







# DECADENCE





# DECADENCE

By MAXIM GORKI

Translated by . . . .

VERONICA SCOTT-GATTY

(Translator of "Reminiscences of My Youth," by Maxim Gorki)



CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD  
LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY

**First published April 1927**  
**3/6 Edition July 1928**

***Printed in Great Britain***

TO  
ROMAIN ROLLAND  
MAN AND POET



# DECADENCE

## PART I

**A**BOUT two years after the Emancipation,<sup>1</sup> on the Day of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, the parishioners of the church of St. Nicholas-on-the-Tychok, noticed at Mass a stranger, who was walking in a crowd of people, jostling them rudely, and placing sumptuous candles in front of the ikons that were held in highest honour in the town of Dryomov. He was a powerful man, with a big nose, a large curly beard strongly marked with grey, and a mass of dark, curly hair like a gipsy. His blue-grey eyes looked out insolently from beneath thick, projecting eyebrows, and it was noticeable that when he dropped his arms his broad palms touched his knees.

He approached the cross in the same row as the most eminent men in the town, a thing which they particularly disliked, and when Mass was over, the most important people in Dryomov stayed in the porch to exchange opinions about the stranger. Some said he was a cattle-dealer, others a mayor, but the *starosta*<sup>2</sup> of the town, Yevsei Baimakov, a peace-loving man, who had bad health but a good heart, said with a quiet cough:

"He is probably a nobleman's servant, a huntsman, or something else to do with gentlefolk's amusements."

But Pomyalov, the draper, an ugly pock-marked man who went by the nickname of "Widower Cockroach," and who

<sup>1</sup> The Emancipation of the Russian peasants from serfdom took place in 1861.

<sup>2</sup> The Elder, the peasant mayor of a rural community.

was also a restless sensualist with a taste for malicious talk, exclaimed malevolently :

“ Do you see what long paws he has ? Look at him walking along as if the bells in every belfry were ringing in his honour ! ”

Dressed in a dark-blue overcoat of stout cloth and a good pair of Russian-leather boots, the broad-shouldered, big-nosed man was marching along the street as if the whole place belonged to him, his hands thrust in his pockets and his elbows pressed close to his sides. Having entrusted the task of finding out details about him to Erdanskaya, the woman who made the holy bread, the townsfolk departed at the sound of bells to eat their pies, after Pomyalov had invited them to tea that evening in his raspberry garden.

After dinner other inhabitants of Dryomov saw the unknown man on the other side of the river, on a spit of land called “ The Cow’s Tongue,” which was on the property of the Ratski princes. He was walking along among the willow bushes, measuring off the sandy spit with broad, even paces, and gazing from under the palms of his hands at the town, at the Oka, and its meandering tributary, the swampy stream Vataraksha. People in Dryomov were cautious, and none of them could make up their minds to shout and ask him who he was and what he was doing. Nevertheless they sent Mashka Stupa, the watchman, who was a drunkard and the buffoon of the town. Regardless of the women present, Stupa shamelessly took off his uniform trousers in front of everybody, but kept on his crumpled cap, and thus proceeded to ford the marshy Vataraksha. Blowing out his great drunken stomach, he waddled up to the stranger like a ridiculous goose, and inquired, in a purposely loud voice, for the sake of bravado, who he was.

The stranger’s reply could not be heard, but Stupa immediately returned to the townsfolk.

“ He asked me,” he told them, “ why I was so ugly. He has great wicked eyes like a robber.”

That evening in Pomyalov’s raspberry garden, Erdanskaya, who made the holy bread—a pendulous-jowled creature, well known as a fortune-teller and a “ wise woman ”—made her report to the better-class people in the town.

"His first name is Ilya," she announced, opening her terrible eyes very wide, "and his surname is Artamonov. He said he wanted to live here on account of his business, but what the business was I could not discover. He arrived by the road from Vorgorod and left by the same road a little after three."

So they found out nothing particular about him, and the fact was as unpleasant as if someone had tapped at the window at night, by way of a wordless warning of some coming disaster, and then slunk away.

Three weeks had gone by, and all traces of the incident had already nearly faded from the memories of the townsfolk, when Artamonov suddenly appeared before Baimakov accompanied by his three children. His words fell like the blows of an axe.

"Here are some new people for you, Yevsei Mitrich, who want to live under your wise rule. Please help me to establish myself in your neighbourhood."

His story was brief and reasonable. He had been employed by the Ratski princes at Kursk, their estate on the river Ratya, as Prince Georgi's steward, but had retired from service at the Emancipation, with a handsome remuneration, and had decided to start a business of his own as a linen manufacturer. He was a widower, and the names of his children were as follows: the eldest was called Pyotr, the hunchback was Nikita, and the third, his adopted nephew, was Olyoshka.

"Our peasants sow little flax," observed Baimakov thoughtfully.

"We will force them to sow more."

Artamonov's voice was thick and gruff, and he spoke as if he were beating a big drum, but Baimakov had all his life gone cautiously about the world speaking in a soft voice, as if he were afraid of waking some terrible monster. His mournful grey eyes were kindly, and as he looked at Artamonov's children standing stonily in the doorway, he blinked at them. They were all very different: the eldest, with his broad chest, converging brows and small bear's eyes, was like his father. Nikita's eyes were those of a girl, large and dark



blue like his shirt, and Alexei was a curly-haired, rosy-cheeked cherub, with a white skin and a merry, open face.

"One of them for the army?" inquired Baimakov.

"No, I want my children myself. I have an exemption for them."

And with a wave of his hand, Artamonov ordered them to go away. When they had filed quietly off, one behind the other in the order of their ages, he placed a heavy palm on Baimakov's knee and said:

"Yevsei Mitrich, I have also come to you as a match-maker. Give your daughter in marriage to my eldest boy."

Baimakov was frightened. He jumped up on the seat and began waving his arms.

"Good gracious! What are you thinking of? This is the first time I have set eyes on you. I don't even know who you are, and you ask me this! I have only one daughter and she is too young to marry, but you have never even seen her. You don't know what she is like. . . . What are you thinking of?"

But Artamonov merely smiled into his curly beard.

"Ask the police captain about me," he said. "He is much indebted to my prince, and the prince has written telling him to give me assistance in everything I undertake. The sacred ikons are my pledge that you will hear nothing against me. I know your daughter, I know everything about your town. I came here four times unobserved and made full inquiries. My eldest has been here too, and has seen your daughter, so don't worry about that."

Feeling as if he had been attacked by a bear, Baimakov begged his visitor to wait.

"I can for a short time, but my age won't allow me to wait for years." Artamonov was obstinate and spoke sternly.

"Come and say good-bye to your host," he shouted through a window into the court-yard.

When they had said good-bye and gone away, Baimakov looked timidly at the ikons, and crossing himself three times, whispered:

## DECADENCE

"Lord have mercy on us! What extraordinary people! Save me from disaster!"

Then, tapping the ground with his stick, he shuffled into the garden where his wife and daughter were boiling jam under a lime tree.

"Who were those lads standing in the court-yard, Mitrich?" asked his stout, handsome wife.

"I don't know. Where is Natalya?"

"Gone to the store-room for sugar."

"For sugar," repeated Baimakov gloomily, sinking down on to a turf seat. "Sugar. Yes, they speak the truth when they say that the Emancipation will bring people more anxiety."

His wife gave him a scrutinizing look and asked in alarm:

"What is the matter? Aren't you well again?"

"I feel very depressed. It seems as if this man had come to take my place in the world."

His wife began to comfort him.

"Why worry?" she said. "Surely, few people nowadays leave the villages for the town."

"That's just it, they do. But I won't say anything to you meanwhile. Let me think it over. . . ."

In five days Baimakov took to his bed. In twelve he was dead, and his death cast a still deeper shadow over Artamonov and his children. During the *Starosta's* illness, Artamonov came to see him twice, and they had a long talk together. The second time he came, Baimakov called his wife.

"There, talk to her," he said, folding his hands wearily on his breast. "Things of this world, it seems, are no longer any concern of mine. Let me rest."

"Come with me, Ulyana Ivanovna," commanded Artamonov, and without looking to see if his hostess were following him, he walked out of the room.

"Go, Ulyana, this is probably fate," was the *Starosta's* quiet advice to his wife, when he saw that she was hesitating to follow their guest. She was a clever woman with plenty of character, and never acted without due reflection; nevertheless on this occasion she returned to her husband in an hour's

time, saying as she flicked away her tears with a movement of her long, beautiful lashes :

"It seems indeed to be fate, Mitrich. Give our daughter your blessing."

In the evening she brought their daughter, dressed in magnificent clothes, to her husband's bedside. Artamonov pushed his son forward, and without exchanging a single glance, the lad and the girl joined hands and knelt down with bowed heads, while Baimakov, panting for breath, held over them the ancient family ikon, set in pearls.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son . . . Lord, by Thy gracious favour, forsake not my only child."

"Remember," he said sternly to Artamonov, "you are answerable to God for my daughter."

The other bowed to him, touching the floor with his hand as he did so.

"I know."

And without a word of affection to his future daughter-in-law, and with hardly a glance at her and his son, he jerked his head towards the door.

"Go," he ordered.

When the betrothed pair had gone out, he sat down on the sick man's bed.

"Don't worry," he said firmly. "Everything will be all right. I worked for my prince for thirty-seven years without being punished once, and man is not a god : he is ungracious and hard to please. As for you, Ulyana, you shall be well looked after. You will be a mother to my boys, and they will be told to treat you with respect."

As Baimakov listened, he was gazing silently at the ikons in the corner, and crying. Ulyana was also sobbing, and Artamonov showed his vexation.

"*Ekb*, Yevsei Mitrich," he said, "you are dying before your time. You haven't taken care of yourself. And I need you so badly !"

He passed his hand over his beard and gave vent to a loud sigh.

"I know about your affairs," he went on, "you are an

## DECADENCE

honourable man and fairly clever. You might have lived with me for five years or so, and we could have done a lot of business together. Still, it is God's will."

Ulyana screamed piteously.

"What are you croaking about, you old raven? Why are you frightening us? Perhaps there is still a . . ."

But Artamonov rose and bowed to Baimakov from the waist as though he were a corpse.

"Thank you for your confidence in me. Good-bye, I must go to the Oka. A barge has arrived there with my belongings."

Baimakov's wife was hurt, and as soon as he had left, she set up a wail:

"The boor, the clodhopper, he could not even find one little word of kindness to say to his son's bride!"

Her husband stopped her.

"Don't grumble," he said, "don't alarm me," and added after a little reflection: "You stick to this man. He seems to be superior to our people."

Baimakov was buried with great honour by the whole town and the clergy of all the five churches. The Artamonovs walked behind the coffin immediately after the dead man's wife and daughter; but the townsfolk did not like it; and, as he walked behind his family, hunchbacked Nikita listened to the murmurs in the crowd:

"Nobody knows who he is, yet all of a sudden he worms himself into the front place."

And Pomyalov whispered, as he rolled his round, acorn-coloured eyes:

"Both the dead man, Yevsei, and Ulyana were cautious people, and never acted upon impulse. Therefore there is some secret. He must have tempted them in some way, or they would never have allied themselves to him by marriage."

"Yes, it is a shady business."

"I call it a shady business too. Forging money, probably. But surely Baimakov lived the life of an honourable man, didn't he?"

Nikita listened with bowed head, his hump arched out as if in expectation of a blow. It was a gusty day. The crowd

had their backs to the wind, and the dust, raised by hundreds of feet, swept along behind them like a cloud of smoke, covering the men's bare heads and oiled hair with powder.

"Look," said someone, "how Artamonov has been peppered by the dust we are making. He has turned quite grey, the gipsy. . . ."

Ten days after her husband's funeral, Ulyana Baimakova and her daughter went away to a convent, and gave up their house to Artamonov. He and his children lived in a whirlwind of activity, and from morning to night were to be seen striding rapidly along the streets or hurriedly crossing themselves as they passed the church. The father was a noisy, violent man, and his eldest son, morose and silent, was obviously suffering from either fear or shyness. Cherubic Olyoshka, though irritable with the lads, gave impudent winks at the girls; while Nikita, as soon as the sun rose, betook himself and his sharp-pointed hump across the river to "The Cow's Tongue," where carpenters and masons had settled down among the rooks, and were building long brick barracks, and beside them, near the Oka, a large two-storied house made of timbers two feet thick—a house which looked like a prison. In the evening the people in Dryomov gathered on the bank of the Vataraksha to listen, while they chewed melon and sunflower seeds, to the rasping and squeaking of saws, the scraping of planes and the insistent chopping of sharp axes, and to pass mocking comments on the futility of building a Tower of Babel.

Pomyalov would make comforting predictions about all the misfortunes that would happen to the strangers.

"In the spring the water will flood those ugly buildings, and there may be a fire. The carpenters smoke tobacco and there are wood-shavings everywhere."

"They are building upon sand," chimed in Vasili, the consumptive priest.

"If they bring factory hands here, drunkenness, theft and immorality will begin."

But the miller and innkeeper, Luka Barski, a huge, bloated man, bursting with fat, spoke consolingly:

"The more people there are," he said in his hoarse bass voice, "the easier it is to feed them. It doesn't matter, let the men go on working."

Nikita Artamonov provided the townspeople with much amusement. Having cut down and rooted up the willow bushes over a large square space, he spent entire days in dragging up greasy mud from the Vataraksha and cutting turf in the marsh. Then, with his hump lifted towards the sky, he would carry the turf away in a wheelbarrow, and spread it about in little black heaps over the sand.

"He is trying to make a kitchen-garden," conjectured the townspeople. "What a fool! You can't manure sand!"

At sunset, when the Artamonovs, headed by their father, were fording the river in single file, and their shadows lay upon the greenish-coloured water, Pomyalov would point them out:

"Look, look! What a funny shadow the hunchback has!"

And they all saw that Nikita's shadow, the third in the line, trembled in an odd way and looked heavier than the long shadows of his brothers. One day, when the river had risen after heavy rain, the hunchback caught his foot in some water-weeds or stumbled into a hole and disappeared under the water, which made all the spectators standing on the bank laugh heartily. The only one to express any pity was Olgushka Orlova, the drunken watchmaker's thirteen-year-old daughter.

"*Oi, oi,*" she screamed, "he will drown!"

She was given a cuff on the back of the head.

"Don't bawl about nothing," she was told.

Alexei, who came last, dived down, seized hold of his brother and set him on his feet again, and when they had climbed up on to the bank, both of them wet and daubed with slime, he went straight towards the townsfolk, so that they had to make way for him to pass.

"*Ekh*, you dirty little beast!" said someone in a frightened voice.

"They don't like us," remarked Pyotr.

"Give them time," replied his father, glancing at his face as they walked along, "and they will."

He gave Nikita a scolding:

"You booby! Look where you are going and don't make the people laugh. We can't live on laughter, you blockhead!"

The Artamonovs did not make friends with anyone. Their housekeeping was done by a fat old woman who dressed entirely in black and had a black shawl tied round her head in such a way that the ends stuck out like horns. She fumbled with her words like a foreigner, and the little she spoke being difficult to understand, it was impossible to find out anything from her about the Artamonovs.

"They pretend to be like monks, the rascals . . ." was all she would say.

It was discovered, however, that the father and the eldest son used often to travel round the neighbouring villages, trying to induce the peasants to sow flax. On one of these journeys, Ilya Artamonov was attacked by some soldiers who had deserted. He killed one of them with a *kistyen*, a two-pound weight attached to a leather strap, fractured the skull of the second, and the third ran away. Though the police captain commended him for his conduct, the young priest of the poor parish of Ilinski ordered him to do penance for murder by standing at prayer in the church for forty nights.

During the autumn evenings Nikita would read aloud to his father and brothers out of the Lives of the Saints and the sermons of the Church Fathers, but his father frequently interrupted him:

"This great wisdom," he would say, "cannot be attained by minds like ours. We are mere workmen, and it is not for us, who have been put in the world to do simple things, to think about such matters. The late Prince Yuri read seven thousand books, and absorbed himself in these ideas to such an extent that he lost his faith in God. He visited every country, was received by every sovereign, and became a celebrated man. But when he built a cloth factory, it was a failure, like everything else that he undertook, and so he spent his whole life living on the bread of the peasants."

When he talked, he pronounced his words with great distinctness and listened to them thoughtfully; then he once more went on lecturing his children:

"Your lives will be difficult for you, because you are a law and a defence to yourselves. I did not live, you see, according to my own free will, but as I was ordered to live. And though I saw it was wrong, I could not mend matters, because it was nothing to do with me. It was my master's business. Not only was I afraid to act on my own initiative, but I dared not even think for myself, for fear of confusing my own ideas with those of my master. Are you listening, Pyotr?"

"Yes."

"That's right. So you understand. A man can be alive and yet have no existence as it were. Of course on the other hand there is less responsibility. You don't do as you like, but are governed by other people. Life is easier without responsibility, but there is not much sense in it."

Sometimes he would talk to the children for an hour or two, inquiring all the time whether they were listening. He would sit on the stove, his legs dangling down, his fingers unwinding the little curls in his beard, and leisurely forge link after link in the chain of words. Warm darkness would reign in the large, clean kitchen and the whistle of the snowstorm would rise and fall outside the window, the panes of which were as smooth as silk. Or else there might be a crackling sound of frost in the blue-cold air. Seated at the table before a tallow candle, Pyotr would quietly move the beads across his abacus, while Alexei helped him, and Nikita skilfully made baskets out of plaited twigs.

"You see, our freedom has been given us by His Majesty the Tsar, and we ought to understand on what grounds it has been given. You don't even free a sheep from a corn-field without some good reason, and in this case the whole nation, consisting of thousands upon thousands, have been freed. That means that the Emperor realized that nothing was to be got out of our masters, because they were squandering everything on themselves. Prince Georgi himself suspected as much, even before the Emancipation, when he told me that slave labour did not pay! And now, look at the trust that is shown in voluntary labour! Nowadays, instead of serving for a term



## DECADENCE

of twenty-five years, even the soldier goes off and works, and every one is bound to show what he can do. The days of the nobility are over and you are now noblemen yourselves. Are you listening ? ”

After spending nearly three months at the convent, Ulyana Baimakova returned home.

“ Shall we arrange the wedding soon ? ” Artamonov asked her on the following day.

She became agitated and her eyes flashed angrily.

“ Think what you are saying ! ” she exclaimed. “ It is not six months since her father’s death, and you dare to . . . Don’t you know it is a sin ? ”

“ I don’t see that it is a sin at all. At any rate the gentry do much worse things and God puts up with it. I need her and Pyotr wants a housewife.”

Then he asked how much money she had.

“ I won’t give more than five hundred for my daughter’s dowry,” she replied.

“ You will give that and more,” said the big peasant with calm assurance, staring into her face. They sat opposite one another at a table, Artamonov leaning on his elbows, with the fingers of both hands buried in the thick masses of his beard, and the woman warily erect, with knitted brows. She was well over thirty, but looked considerably younger, and her intelligent grey eyes shone sternly out of her plump, rosy face. Artamonov rose and straightened himself.

“ You are beautiful, Ulyana Ivanovna.”

“ Have you anything more to say ? ” she asked with angry disdain.

“ I won’t say anything more.”

He went off reluctantly, shuffling his feet in his despondence, and Ulyana stood looking after him. Incidentally she let her eyes skim over the surface of the mirror, and whispered regretfully :

“ The bearded devil ! Why did he meddle . . . ? ”

Feeling she was in danger from this man, she went upstairs to find her daughter, but there was no sign of Natalya there,

and glancing out of a window she caught sight of her at the court-yard gate, with Pyotr standing beside her. Ulyana ran quickly downstairs, and shouted to her from the doorsteps:

"Natalya, come in!"

Pyotr made her a bow.

"It is not right for a handsome young fellow to talk to a girl, without her mother being there," she explained. "This must not happen again."

"She is engaged to me," Pyotr reminded her.

"That makes no difference. It's our custom," said Ulyana, yet she asked herself why she had got so angry. "Love-making is for young people. This won't do. It looks as if I were jealous of my daughter."

Indoors she gave a vicious tug to her daughter's pigtail and forbade her to talk to her fiancé alone.

"Even though he is engaged to you," she said severely, "there may be rain or there may be snow, you may be married, but you never know!"

Her thoughts were disturbed by a vague fear, and in a few days' time she went to have her fortune told by Erdanskaya, she being the fat, pendulous-jowled witch, shaped like a bell, to whom all the women in the town brought their transgressions, fears and sorrows.

"There is nothing to tell in your case," said Erdanskaya, "but I will say one thing frankly, my dear: hold on to that man. I haven't a pair of eyes below my forehead for nothing. I know people. I sift them as I sift my pack of cards. Look how successful he is, all his affairs roll merrily on like a ball. Our peasants here are only spiteful because they are jealous. No, my dear, don't you be afraid of him. He is not like a fox, but a bear!"

"That's it, like a bear," agreed the widow, and with a sigh she recounted her story to the fortune-teller.

"I am afraid of him. I was frightened the very first time, when he made a match between my daughter and his son. It seemed as if a complete stranger had suddenly dropped from a cloud, and forced himself upon me as a relation. Does this sort of thing often happen? I remember that when

he spoke I looked into his great insolent eyes and answered yes to every word he said, and agreed to everything as if he had me by the throat."

"That means that he believes in his own strength," explained the wise maker of holy bread.

But all this failed to calm Ulyana, although the parting words of the witch, as she saw her off at the door of her dark room, filled with a suffocating smell of medicinal herbs, were:

"Remember, fools are only successful in fairy stories. . . ."

She grew suspiciously loud in her praises of Artamonov, in fact so loud and so effusive that she gave the impression of having been bribed. But Matryona Barskaya, a big, dark woman, as dried up as a salted fish, spoke very differently:

"The whole town is making moan over you, Ulyana," she said. "How is it that you are not afraid of these newcomers? *Oi!* Only look at them. It is not for nothing that one boy is a hunchback. His parents must have committed some great sin for him to have been born deformed. . . ."

The more difficult things were for widow Baimakova the more often she beat her daughter, though she fully realized that she had no cause for being angry with her. She tried to see her tenants as rarely as possible, but they appeared before her all the more frequently and clouded her life with anxiety.

Winter stole imperceptibly nearer, till it suddenly descended upon the town in roaring snowstorms and severe frosts, encumbering streets and houses with sugary mounds of snow, putting padded caps on bird-boxes and the cupolas of churches, and riveting the river and the rusty water of the marshes in its white fetters. On the frozen Oka boxing matches began to take place between the townsfolk and the peasants from the surrounding villages, and every holiday Alexei took part in a fight, but every time he returned home angry and defeated.

"What is the matter, Olyoshka?" Artamonov used to inquire. "The boxers here are apparently cleverer than ours."

Alexei would rub his bruises with a copper coin or bits of ice and remain sullenly silent, his hawk-like eyes now and then lit up by a sudden gleam. But one day Pyotr said:

"Alexei is a clever boxer, it is the townspeople on his own side who beat him."

"Why is that?" asked Ilya Artamonov, laying his fist on the table.

"They dislike him."

"Just him?"

"No, all of us."

Their father struck the table such a heavy blow with his fist that the candle sprang from the candlestick and went out. In the darkness a voice was heard to growl:

"Why do you always talk to me about love, as if you were a prostitute? I don't want to hear any more."

Nikita lit the candle and said quietly:

"Olyosha ought not to go to the boxing matches."

"That would only mean that people would laugh and say that Artamonov was frightened! Shut up, you sexton! You dot of a mushroom!"

Ilya scolded them all, and then at supper a few days later said with querulous kindness:

"You ought to go and hunt bears, children. It is splendid sport! I used to go to the forests of Ryazan with Prince Georgi, and kill them with hunting-spears. It was most interesting."

He recounted to them with growing animation several incidents in a successful hunt, and in a week's time went off to the forest with Pyotr and Alexei and killed a huge old he-bear. Then the brothers went off by themselves and roused a she-bear, which tore Alexei's fur coat and scratched his hip. Nevertheless they overcame her, and brought two cubs back to the town, leaving the animal they had killed in the forest to make a supper for the wolves.

"Well, and how are your friends the Artamonovs getting on?" the townspeople would inquire of Ulyana.

"Don't you worry, they are all right," was the reply.

"Even a pig is tame in winter time," remarked Pomyalov.

Though she dared not trust to her own judgment, the widow had been conscious for some time past that this attitude of hostility towards the Artamonovs was growing distasteful

to her and that the general hatred of them was going so far as to show itself in a certain coolness towards herself. She saw that they were sober, friendly people, who persistently attended to their own business, and who, as far as could be seen, possessed no vices. After keeping a watchful eye on Pyotr and her daughter, she felt convinced that the silent, thick-set lad possessed a seriousness beyond his years, and that he was making no attempts either to squeeze Natalya in dark corners, or to tickle her, or to whisper improprieties into her ear, as was the fashion of the young men of the town. Yet she was somewhat alarmed by his attitude towards her daughter, which was incomprehensibly cold, but at the same time protective and even a little jealous.

"He won't be a kind husband," she thought.

But one day, as she was coming downstairs, she heard her daughter's voice in the hall below :

"Are you going bear-hunting again ?"

"We hope to. But why do you ask ?"

"It is dangerous. Olyosha was clawed by one animal."

"It was his own fault. He shouldn't have got so excited. Does this mean that you think about me ?"

"I didn't say anything about you."

"Oh, you rascal !" thought her mother with a smile, and then with a sigh : "What a simpleton he is !"

And all the time Ilya Artamonov was persistently saying :

"Hurry on the wedding, or they will hurry it on themselves."

She saw there was need for haste, for the girl was sleeping badly at night and could no longer disguise the fact that she was overcome with longing. At Easter she again took her away to a convent, and on her return home, in a month's time, noticed that her neglected garden was in excellent order, the paths weeded, the lichen taken off the trees and the shrubs clipped and tied up. Everything had been done by an experienced hand. As she was going down the path to the river, she noticed Nikita the hunchback, mending a wattle fence which had been undermined by the spring floods. Beneath the long linen shirt, which reached below his knees, the bones in his humped back stuck out pitifully, nearly hiding his large

head and straight, fair hair from view. To prevent his hair from falling over his face, he had tied it back with a birch twig, and as he stood there, a grey object among the juicy green leaves, he looked like a little old hermit, filled with self-sacrificing enthusiasm for his work. He was swinging a hatchet that gleamed like silver in the sun and dexterously cutting a stake; and as he worked he softly hummed a church chant in the high-pitched voice of a girl. Beyond the wattle fence the silky water gleamed green, and golden reflections of the sun played about in it like carp.

"God bless you," said the woman tenderly, rather to her own surprise. Nikita flashed a soft glance at her from his dark blue eyes, and answered:

"God save you."

"Is it you who have tidied the garden?"

"Yes."

"You have done it well. Do you like gardens?"

He briefly told her, as he knelt on the ground, that at nine years old he had been given to the prince as gardener's assistant, and that now he was nineteen.

"A hunchback, but not ill-natured, it seems," reflected the woman.

In the evening when she was sitting upstairs with her daughter drinking tea, Nikita appeared at the door, holding a bunch of flowers in his hand, his plain, sallow, melancholy face lit up by a smile.

"Please accept a bouquet."

"What is the reason of this?" asked Ulyana in astonishment, suspiciously examining the beautiful bunch of flowers and grasses. Nikita explained that when he was in service, it had been his duty to take some flowers to the princess every morning.

"I see, and am I like the princess?" asked Ulyana, turning a little pink and raising her head proudly. "She was a great beauty, wasn't she?"

"Well, you are too, you know."

Ulyana flushed still redder and wondered whether he had heard that from his father.

"Well, thank you for the honour you have done me," she said, but she did not invite him to tea, and when he had left, she put her thoughts into words.

"He has beautiful eyes; they are not like his father's, he must get them from his mother," and she heaved a sigh.

"It seems to be our fate to live with them."

She did not employ much persuasion to induce Artamonov to wait for the wedding until the autumn, when a whole year would have passed since the day of her husband's death. Instead she declared with great determination:

"If you will only give up this idea, Ilya Vasilyevich, and let me make all the arrangements in the good old-fashioned way, as we are accustomed to do, it will be an advantage to you as well as to me. You will at once be received into all the best society and people will begin to take notice of you."

"Well, they seem to have given me enough publicity as it is," growled Artamonov proudly.

"People here don't like you," she said, offended by his arrogance.

"Well, they will soon be afraid of me."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "And here is Pyotr too, always singing about love. What strange people you are . . ."

"Their dislike is plainly extending itself to me too."

"Don't worry about that!"

Artamonov raised a long paw and clenched his fist firmly.

"I know how to mould people to my will," he said, "you won't dance round me for long. I can do without even love. . . ."

The woman relapsed into silence.

"What a beast!" she thought to herself, unaccountably alarmed.

And so her comfortable house is filled with her daughter's friends—girls belonging to the best families in the town. They are all sumptuously dressed in old brocade *sarafans*,<sup>1</sup> with white, puffed-out sleeves made of muslin and fine linen,

<sup>1</sup> The national dress of Russian women.

the arm-holes being ornamented with silk embroidery. They wear lace at their wrists, shoes made of goat-skin and morocco leather, and ribbons on their long girlish plaits. The bride is a little breathless under the weight of her silver brocaded *sarajan*, with its gilt filigree buttons reaching from the collar to the hem of the skirt, and a coat of gold brocade on her shoulders, trimmed with white and pale blue ribbons. She sits like a block of melting ice in the corner under the ikon, wiping her perspiring face with a lace handkerchief and reciting verses in a clear voice :

“Over meadows green and lew,  
Over flowers azure blue,  
Flowed the water in the spring,  
Turbid, cold and murmuring.”

A chorus of her friends takes up the dying refrain in her girlish lament :

“They send me off, a poor man’s daughter,  
Send me off to fetch them water,  
They send me barefoot and unshod,  
They send me naked and unclad. . . .”

Unobserved among the crowd of girls, Alexei is roaring with laughter.

“That’s a funny song !” he cries. “A girl is pushed into brocade, like a turkey-hen into a tin pail, and you shout out that she is naked and undressed !”

Near the bride sits Nikita : his new dark-blue coat riding up in a funny misshapen way over his hump, his blue eyes open wide and fixed in a strange stare on Natalya, as if he were afraid she would suddenly melt away and vanish out of his sight. Standing in the doorway, which she entirely fills up, is Matryona Barskaya, who rolls her eyes and drones in a deep bass voice :

“Your songs aren’t mournful enough, girls.”

She stalks about, taking long paces like a horse, and sternly tries to make the girls sing their songs in the old-fashioned way, telling them there must be a certain amount of trepidation in their preparations for the wedding.

“The saying is that to be married is to be behind a stone



wall ; and as you know, if the wall is strong, you can't knock it down, and if it is high, you can't jump over it."

But the girls pay no attention to her, and as the room is crowded and hot, they push the old woman away, and run out into the court-yard and the garden. In the middle of them, like a bee buzzing among flowers, is Alexei, dressed in a gold-coloured silk shirt and plush breeches, as noisy and merry as a drunken man.

Meanwhile Barskaya, pouting her thick lips in high dudgeon and opening her eyes very wide, lifts the hem of her silk skirt high in front of her, and sails upstairs to Ulyana, like a cloud of thick smoke.

"Your daughter is too gay," she announces prophetically, "it is not the rule, nor the usual thing. A gay beginning means a bad ending !"

Ulyana is on her knees, busily rummaging in a large iron-bound chest, and round her, on the floor and on the bed, are scattered bits of silk, taffeta, Moscow fustian, cashmere shawls, ribbons and embroidered towels, making the room look like a booth in a fair. A broad beam of sunlight lies across these bright materials and all their different colours glow like a sunset cloud.

"It is not right for the bridegroom to be living in the bride's house before the wedding. The Artamonovs ought to have gone away."

"You should have said so before ; it is too late to talk about that now," mutters Ulyana, bending over the chest so as to hide her vexation.

"The rumour was that you were sensible," she hears the bass voice continuing, "so I said nothing. I imagined you would think of it yourself. After all, what do I care ! It is my duty to tell the truth, and if people won't accept it, at any rate the Lord will reward me."

Barskaya stands like a monument, holding her head very still, as if it were a bowl filled to the brim with wisdom. Then, without waiting for a reply, she goes out of the door, and Ulyana on her knees, amid a blaze of coloured stuffs, whispers in her misery and fear :

"Lord help me ! Don't drive me out of my senses."

Again there is a sound at the door, and she hastily thrusts her head into the chest to hide her tears. It is Nikita.

"Natalya Yevsevna has sent me to ask if you want any help."

"Thank you, dear . . ."

"Olgunka Orlova has poured the treacle over herself in the kitchen."

"No, has she really ? Clever little girl ! She'll make a good bride for you. . . ."

"Who would marry me ?"

Under the lime tree in the garden, Ilya Artamonov, Gavril Barski the bride's godfather, Pomyalov, Zhiteikin the vacant-eyed tanner, and Voroponov the cartwright, sit at a round table, drinking beer ; and leaning against the trunk of the lime tree stands Pyotr, his dark hair so plentifully smeared with oil that his head appears to be made of iron. He is listening respectfully to the conversation of his elders.

"Your customs are different from ours," says his father thoughtfully.

"Yes, we are the original people of Great Russia," brags Pomyalov.

"We are not outsiders either. . . ."

"Our customs are more ancient. . . ."

"But many of you are Mordvinians<sup>1</sup> and Chuvashes.<sup>1</sup> . . ."

With squeaks of laughter and much pushing, the girls ran down into the garden, and encircling the table with a bright garland of *sarafans*, struck up a song of praise :

"Oh, great is Ilya Vasilyevich,  
He takes a step and his leg breaks,  
He takes a second and the other breaks,  
He takes a third and his neck breaks."

"What an honour this is !" exclaimed Artamonov in surprise, turning to his son, but Pyotr gave a cautious smile and continued to cast glances at the girls and to pull his ear.

<sup>1</sup> Both Finno-Ugric races, living in Central Russia and still retaining many non-Christian practices.

"You must listen to this," counselled Barski, roaring with laughter :

"What shall we do to you to-day  
For coming to steal the bride away ?"

"Is there anything else ?" shouted Artamonov excitedly, rapping his fingers on the table in an evident state of confusion. But the girls sang lustily :

"On a harrow you'll be flung,  
Merry songs around you sung,  
Stones shall pelt you from the hill;  
And this because you treat us ill,  
And fill our ears with foolish lies  
By singing praises to the skies  
Of distant lands with sorrow sown  
Where tears like floods have overflown."

"What is all this for ?" exclaimed Artamonov in an offended tone. "Well, girls, I don't want to vex you, but I am going to praise my own part of the country all the same. Our customs are less harsh than yours and our people more courteous. It was among us that the saying arose, 'The Svapa and the Usozha flow into the Seim—not, thank God, into the Oka!'"

"You wait, you don't know yet," said Barski in a tone that was something between a boast and a threat. "And now then, give a present to the girls."

"How much shall I give them ?"

"As much as you can spare."

But when Artamonov gave them two silver roubles, Pomyalov said angrily :

"You are too lavish; that's sheer swagger!"

"Well, you are so difficult to please!" shouted Ilya, growing angry in his turn, at which Barski burst into a deafening guffaw and Zhiteikin let off a sharp little laugh.

The bridal party came to an end at dawn. The guests had departed and nearly everybody in the house had gone to sleep, but Artamonov sat on in the garden with Pyotr and Nikita, stroking his beard and talking in a low voice.

"The people are rough," he said, looking round the garden and blinking at the clouds. "They are churlish. You, Pet-

rukha, must do everything that your mother-in-law advises. They'll only be the trifling requests of a woman, but you must attend to them all the same. Has Alexei gone to see the girls off? He is liked by girls, but not by young men. Barski's son looks daggers at him. . . . I've noticed it! Nikita, you must be kinder to people. You can if you wish. Come to your father's help and, when I have a crack anywhere, come and stop it up for me with putty."

He took a peep with one eye into a large wooden tub.

"They have lapped up every drop," he continued crossly. "They drink like horses. What are you thinking of, Pyotr?"

His son was fingering the silk sash, which was the bride's present to him:

"Life is simpler and more peaceful in the country," he said softly.

"Well, nothing can be simpler than sleeping away the day. . . ."

"They are trying to put off the wedding."

"Have patience."

The great and difficult day dawns for Pyotr at last. He sits in the corner of the room under the ikon, knowing that his brows are knit in a stern frown, and although he feels that this is not right and does not enhance his beauty in the eyes of his bride he cannot part them. They seem to be sewn together with strong thread. He takes sidelong glances at the guests and shakes his hair, and the hops which have been thrown at him drop on to the table and on to Natalya's long veil. She too is dejected, and puts her hand wearily over her eyes, looking very white and frightened like a child, and trembling with shyness.

"Kiss!"<sup>1</sup> For the twentieth time the shout goes up from the hairy faces and grinning mouths.

Pyotr twists round like a wolf without turning his head, lifts up Natalya's veil and thrusts his nose and dry lips into her cheek. He feels the satin coolness of her skin, the frightened quiver of

<sup>1</sup> According to the Russian custom, whenever the guests at a wedding party call out "Gorko!" (which means bitter) the newly married bride and bridegroom are bound to kiss each other before the assembled guests.

her shoulder, and is sorry for her, for he too is very shy. But the close-packed ring of half-drunken people only bawl out:

"He doesn't know how to do it!"

"Aim at her lips!"

"*Ekk*, I should know how to kiss her!"

"I'll give you such a kissing if you do!" whines a drunken woman's voice.

"Kiss!" roars Barski.

Pyotr clenches his teeth and kisses the girl's wet lips, which quiver at his touch, and her white figure seems to melt away like a cloud before the sun. They are both hungry, for they have had nothing to eat since the day before. Pyotr feels he is intoxicated, partly with excitement and partly because of the pungent smell of alcohol and the two glasses of sparkling Tsimlya wine which he has drunk, and he is afraid of his bride noticing it. Everything is rocking round him, now merging into a many-coloured heap, now spreading out in all directions in red bubbles which form themselves into unpleasant faces. He looks first entreatingly, then angrily at his father, but Ilya Artamonov goes on shouting lustily as if nothing were the matter and gazing into Ulyana's rosy face.

"Let us drink to each other's health in honey-wine," he exclaims. "Your wine is as sweet as yourself. . . ."

As she stretches out her round white arm, her gold bracelet, set with coloured stones, sparkles in the sun and a stream of pearls descends over her high bosom. She also has had too much to drink. There is a sickly smile in her grey eyes and her half-open lips are making seductive little movements. Having touched Artamonov's glass with hers, she drinks, and makes a bow to him, but he shakes his shaggy head and shouts in admiration:

"What charming manners you have! A princess couldn't have better, damn it!"

Pyotr vaguely realizes that his father is not behaving properly. Amid the drunken uproar which the guests are making, he distinctly catches the sound of Pomyalov's malicious exclamations, of Barski's reproaches delivered in his bass voice, and of Zhiteikin's shrill laughter.

"This is not a wedding," he thinks to himself, "it is a court of justice." And he hears someone say :

"Look, how he is gazing at Ulyana, the devil! *Oi, Oi!*"

"There will be another wedding soon, only there won't be priests there. . . ."

For a moment the words drum themselves into his ears. Then Natalya's knee or elbow touches him, causing an alarming sense of languor to creep over every limb and he at once forgets them. He tries not to look at her, and succeeds in keeping his head still, but he cannot control his eyes, which persistently move in her direction.

"Will this soon be over?" he whispers, and Natalya whispers back :

"I don't know."

"It's disgraceful."

"Yes," he hears her say, and is glad that his bride feels as he does.

Meanwhile Alexei and the girls were feasting in the garden, and Nikita was sitting beside a lanky priest, a man with a wet beard and yellow, copper-coloured eyes set in a pock-marked face. In the street and in the court-yard stood the townspeople, gazing in through the open windows, where their heads could be seen moving about in the blue dusk, as every other minute they exchanged places. Open-mouthed with curiosity, they whispered, hissed and shouted, giving the windows the appearance of sacks, out of which their noisy heads were on the point of tumbling and rolling down into the room like water-melons. Nikita was particularly struck by the face of Tikhon Vyalov the day labourer, who had high cheek-bones framed in a thick crop of reddish hair and was covered with red spots. His eyes, which at first sight appeared colourless, had a curious twinkle in them, and when he winked he twinkled his pupils without moving his eyelashes. His mouth was small and his thin, motionless lips, which he kept obstinately compressed, were almost covered by his curly moustache. His ears, however, were pressed back in an ugly way to his skull. He was leaning his chest on the window-sill, and when people tried to push him away, he did not make a row or swear at them, but, without

uttering a word, shook them off with a slight movement of his elbows and shoulders. These were so round that they entirely hid his neck, and his head appeared to be growing straight out of his chest. He too seemed to be a hunchback, and Nikita detected something kindly and good in his expression.

The round-shouldered youth suddenly struck a tambourine with a resounding crash, and as he ran his finger firmly over the parchment the tambourine began to moan and hum. Someone else whistled and stretched out on his knees a concertina with two sets of keys, whereupon Styepasha Barski, a little round curly-haired fellow, who was a friend of the bride's, instantly started whirling round in the middle of the room and stamping on the floor, crying out in time to the music :

“ Maidens ho ! My enemies !  
 Ye crafty, guileful dancers.  
 Hark to the call of my sixpennies jingling,  
 In merry dances let's be mingling.  
 Maidens ho ! My enemies ! ”

His father drew himself up to the full extent of his huge height.

“ Styepka,” he thundered out, “ don't give your own town away ! Show these chickens what you can really do ! ”

At this Ilya Artamonov sprang up and threw back his head, his hair dishevelled like a hearth-brush. The blood rushed to his face and his nose turned the colour of a red-hot ember, as he bawled at Barski :

“ We are not chickens, let me tell you. We are young cockerels ! And we don't know yet which side will beat the other at dancing. Olyosha ! ”

Shining all over as though he were coated with varnish, Alexei smilingly watched the Dryomov dancer. Then he suddenly turned pale and started dancing himself at an incredible speed, screaming all the time like a girl.

“ He does not know any words,” shouted the Dryomov people, and instantly they heard Artamonov in desperation :  
 “ Olyoshka, I'll kill you ! ”

So Alexei put two fingers in his mouth, and keeping on the

move the whole time as if he were literally dodging small shot, he uttered a piercing whistle and then, in a clear voice, recited the words :

“There was a day  
When our master Mokei  
Had footmen five,  
As I'm alive.  
That day is past, as I'm alive,  
Gentleman Mokei is one of the five.”

“There you see !” shouted Artamonov in triumph.

“O-ho !” exclaimed the priest in a meaning tone, and raising his finger, he gently nodded his head.

“Alexei is a better dancer than your friend,” Pyotr said to Natalya.

“He is lighter on his feet,” she replied timidly.

The two fathers kept egging their children on as though they were fighting-cocks. They stood next each other, shoulder to shoulder, in a half-drunken state—the one huge and clumsy like a sack of oats, with tears of drunken rapture streaming from the narrow little red slits under his eyebrows, and the other keyed up in readiness for a spring, his long arms swinging, his hands passing lightly over his hips, and his eyes almost those of a madman. Pyotr saw that his father's beard was moving over his cheek-bone.

“He is grinding his teeth,” he thought to himself. “He will strike someone in a minute. . . .”

“How badly Artamonov's son dances !” Matryona Barskaya was heard to say in her trumpet-like voice. “He has no style. A poor show !”

At this remark, Ilya Artamonov burst out laughing in her face, which was dark, and as round as a frying-pan, and guffawed within an inch of her broad nose, for Alexei had won, and Barski's son was tottering towards the door.

“Now then, you come out and dance !” he commanded, seizing Ulyana roughly by the arm.

But she turned pale, and waving her free arm in the air, indignantly struggled to free herself.

“What are you thinking of ?” she asked in some confusion.



"It is not becoming for me to dance. What can you be dreaming of?"

Silence fell upon the guests. Pomyalov smiled and exchanged glances with Barskaya.

"Come now, what does it matter, Ulyana?" he said, and his words sizzled like hot butter. "You humour him and go and dance. The Lord will forgive you."

"The sin be upon my head!" shouted Artamonov.

He seemed to have grown sober, for he frowned heavily as if he were entering a fight and went forward as though impelled by a force outside himself. Drunken Ulyana was pushed towards him. First she staggered and stumbled, then she drew herself up, threw her head back, and went into the circle where they danced. Pyotr caught an astonished whisper:

"Good gracious! Her husband has not been dead a year, and yet her daughter is being married and she herself is actually dancing!"

He realized, without looking at his wife, that she was ashamed of her mother, and murmured:

"Father shouldn't have danced."

"Nor should mother," she answered in a soft, sad voice.

She stood on a bench, looking over the heads of the crowded ring of people, but when it shook, she clutched Pyotr by the shoulder.

"Hush!" he said kindly, supporting her by the elbow.

Through the open windows reflections of the sunset were streaming over the heads of the onlookers into the room where the man and the woman were circling blindly round in the ruddy light. The garden, the court-yard and the street were full of laughter and shouting, but the stuffy room was growing quieter and quieter. To the accompaniment of the dull rumble which came from the tight-stretched parchment of the tambourine, and to the whine of the concertina, the two figures within the crowded circle of lads and girls continued their mad, convulsive whirl of movement.

The lads and girls looked on at their dance in serious silence, as if it were an event of unusual importance, but the more staid part of the company went out into the court-yard,

leaving indoors only those who were drowsily or helplessly drunk.

At last Artamonov stamped on the ground and stood still.

"Well, Ulyana Ivanovna," he said, "you've beaten me!"

The woman trembled, then she too came to a standstill, as if confronted by a wall.

"Don't judge us too severely," she said, bowing all round to everybody.

She left the room immediately, fanning herself with her handkerchief as she went, and Barskaya appeared in her place.

"Separate the bride and bridegroom," she ordered. "Now then, Pyotr, come to me, and you, his best men, take him by the arms and bring him along."

But his father pushed the best men aside and laid his long, heavy hands on Pyotr's shoulders.

"Go and God bless you!" he said. "Let us embrace!"

Then he pushed his son away, and the best men took him by the arms and bore him away, led by Barskaya, who went along muttering to herself and spitting in all directions:

"*Twb, twb!* Let no illness, nor trouble, nor jealousy, nor dishonour come near! *Twb!* Fire and water in due season, bring him not harm but happiness!"

When Pyotr followed her into Natalya's room, where a magnificent bed had been prepared, the old woman sat down heavily on a chair in the middle of the room.

"Listen to me and don't forget!" she said solemnly. "Here are two half-rouble pieces for you. Put them in your boots under your heel. Natalya will come and kneel down before you and want to take your boots off, but you mustn't let her."

"Why not?" asked Pyotr crossly.

"That's not your business. Three times you must refuse her, but at the fourth give her permission, and then she will kiss you three times and you must give her the half-rouble pieces and say: 'This is a present for you, my slave, my destiny!' Remember that! And now undress and lie down with your back to her, and she will come and ask you to let her spend the night with you. Don't say a word, but wait till she

has asked three times and then stretch out your hand to her. Do you understand? And then . . .”

Pyotr gazed in astonishment at the broad, dark face of his instructress as she distended her nostrils, licked her lips, wiped her greasy chin and neck with a handkerchief, and in a distinct and authoritative voice pronounced these coarse and shameless words:

“Don’t believe in her screams and don’t believe in her tears,” she repeated at parting, and staggered out of the room, leaving behind her a smell of drink. Pyotr was transported with rage. He tore off his boots and flung them underneath the bedstead. Then he quickly undressed, sprang into bed as he would have done into the saddle, and clenched his teeth for fear of bursting into tears at the greatness of the insult which was choking him.

“The devils of the marshes confound her!”

It was hot in the down bed, and presently he jumped out on to the floor, and going over to the window, flung open the casement. From the garden streamed up the drone of drunken voices, boisterous laughter and the shrieks of girls; and in the blue dusk, black figures wandered among the trees. The slender spire of St. Nicholas’s belfry thrust a copper finger up into the sky, for the cross on it had been taken away to be gilded. Behind the roofs of the houses lay the melancholy gleam of the Oka with a crescent moon waning above it, and farther still lay endless forests banked up like black snowdrifts. It all reminded him of another country, a spacious country of golden fields, and he sighed at the thought of it. There was a trampling of feet and the sound of giggling on the stairs, and he once more sprang into bed. The door opened. There was a rustle of silk ribbons, the creak of shoes and the sound of someone sobbing and crying. The door-hook rattled as it was placed in the catch. Pyotr raised his head cautiously. In the half-darkness near the door stood a white figure, crossing itself with a rhythmic movement of its arm and bending down almost to the ground.

“She is saying her prayers, and I have not said mine.”

But he had no desire to pray.

"Natalya Yevseyevna," he began softly, "don't be frightened. I am frightened myself. I have been torturing myself."

He stroked his hair with both hands, and pulled his ear.

"There is no need for you to take off my boots and all the rest of it," he murmured. "That's all nonsense. I am feeling anxious, and she was only joking. So don't cry."

She sidled cautiously up to the window and said softly:

"People are still enjoying themselves."

"Yes."

Though they were both tired, they were nervous and hesitated to go near each other, and so for a long time they kept up an unnecessary conversation. At dawn there was a creak on the stairs. Someone's hand began fumbling along the wall. Natalya went to the door.

"Don't let Barskaya in," whispered Pyotr.

"It's mother," said Natalya, as she opened the door. Pyotr sat up in bed and dangled his legs over the side. He was dissatisfied with himself and thought sadly:

"I was weak and didn't dare. Perhaps she'll laugh at me. I shall wait now until . . ."

The door opened and Natalya said quietly:

"Mother is calling you."

She leant her back against the stove, becoming almost invisible against the white Dutch tiles, while Pyotr went outside the door, and there in the dark was met by the offended, frightened, and eager whisper of Ulyana:

"What are you doing, Pyotr Ilyich? What do you mean? Do you want to bring disgrace upon me and my daughter? Look, it is already morning."

While she spoke, she held Pyotr by the shoulder with one hand, and kept pushing him away with the other.

"What is it?" she asked, full of agitation. "Don't be frightened of me, tell me about it. . . ."

"I was sorry for her," said Pyotr dully. "I was frightened."

Though he could not see his mother-in-law's face, he thought he heard the sound of a woman's snigger.

"No, you go back now, and do as a husband should. Pray to the martyr St. Christopher. Go, but let me kiss you first."

She clasped him tightly round the neck, breathing into his face the warm smell of wine, and kissed him with her sweet, sticky lips. As he had not time to return it, he impressed a smacking kiss on the empty air and went back into the little room. Locking the door behind him, he resolutely held out his arms, and the girl came submissively forward and entered the circle of his arms.

"She is a little drunk," she said in a trembling voice.

Pyotr was expecting something different.

"Don't be afraid," he murmured as he moved backwards towards the bed. "I am not beautiful, but I am good. . . ."

She pressed still closer to him and whispered :

"I can hardly stand on my feet. . . ."

In Dryomov people loved feasting, and the wedding celebrations were extended over five days. During this time they wandered about from morning till midnight, crowding along the streets on their way from one house to another, and moving about in a hurly-burly of drunkenness. The Barskis arranged a particularly lavish and sumptuous banquet, though Alexei had thrashed their son for giving offence in some way or other to Olga Orlova, a girl in her teens. When the Barskis complained to Artamonov about Alexei, he was astonished :

"Show me the place," he asked, "where young fellows don't fight !"

He gave generous presents of ribbons and fairings to the girls, and money to the lads. As for their fathers and mothers, he made them extremely drunk and embraced everybody and shook them all by the shoulders.

"*Ekh*, good people," he would say, "are we alive or are we not ?"

His behaviour was boisterous. He drank a great deal, drenching his inside with liquid as if it were afire, yet he never got intoxicated and grew noticeably thinner during those few days. Though he avoided Ulyana Baimakova, his children noticed that he kept looking at her in an angry exacting way. He was very proud of his strength and was always joining in tugs-of-war with the soldiers of the garrison, On one occasion

he overpowered a fireman and three masons. After that he was approached by Tikhon Vyalov the labourer, who came to him not with a suggestion but with a demand :

"Now you must wrestle with me," he said.

Surprised at his tone, Artamonov surveyed the labourer's thick-set frame.

"And what kind of fellow are you, strong or boastful ? "

"I don't know," answered the other seriously.

Seizing each other by their belts, they stamped about for a long time without moving their ground. Ilya, who was the taller of the two, though slighter and somewhat better proportioned, was looking over Vyalov's shoulder at the women and shamelessly winking at them ; and Vyalov was leaning his shoulder against his antagonist's chest, and trying to lift him up and throw him over his head. Realizing what he was doing, Ilya called out :

"You are not sharp enough, mate, you are not sharp enough ! "

And then with a groan of effort, he suddenly reversed the proceedings and threw Tikhon over his head with such force that the labourer hurt both his legs as he struck the ground.

"A powerful man," said the labourer shamefacedly, as he sat on the grass and wiped the sweat from his face.

"So we see," replied the onlookers in derision.

"A strong man," repeated Vyalov.

Ilya stretched out a hand to him.

"Get up !" he said.

Refusing the proffered hand, the man tried to rise, but failed, and once stretched his legs out on the grass, looking after the crowd with a strange, melting gaze. Nikita came up to him.

"Are you hurt ? " he inquired sympathetically. "Can I help you ? "

The labourer laughed.

"My bones hurt. I am stronger than your father, but not so clever. Come now, Nikita Ilyich, you simpleton, let us follow the others."

And taking the hunchback's arm in a friendly way, he fol-

lowed the crowd, stamping his feet on the ground, presumably in the hope that this would ease the pain.

The newly married couple, though exhausted by fatigue and sleepless nights, had perforce to hover about the streets among the noisy, motley, drinking throng, in order to show themselves to the people. They drank, they ate, they were covered with confusion at the improper jokes they heard, and tried hard not to look at each other. As they walked about arm in arm or sat side by side as they invariably did, they were as silent as strangers. Matryona Barskaya was delighted at this.

"Your son has been well taught, hasn't he?" she said boastfully to Ilya and Ulyana. "Indeed he has! Look, Ulyana, how well I have trained your daughter! And as for your son-in-law, he struts about like a peacock, as if he were lord of all he surveyed."

But when they went to bed in their own room, Pyotr and Natalya would throw off all the conventions which they had so humbly accepted, just as they threw off their clothes, and talk about the day they had spent.

"There is a lot of drinking here," Pyotr would say in astonishment.

"Is there less with you?" his wife would inquire.

"Is it possible for peasants to drink so much!"

"You are not like the peasants."

"We were servants to a nobleman. That makes one a kind of nobleman oneself."

Sometimes they would sit at the window with their arms round each other, and drink in the delicious scents of the garden without saying a word.

"Why are you so silent?" his wife would ask softly, and her husband would reply in the same quiet tone.

"I have no desire for ordinary conversation."

He would have liked to listen to conversation that was out of the ordinary, but Natalya did not know how to make it. When he told her of the boundless breadth and the spaciousness of the golden steppes, she asked:

"Aren't there any forests there? Not any at all? Oi, how terrible it must be!"

"Terrors live in the forests," said Pyotr a little wearily. "What is there to fear on the steppes? There, there is the earth, the sky, and yourself."

Once when they were sitting at the window in silent rapture over the starry night, they thought they heard a stir in the garden, near the bath-house. Someone was running and brushing against the twigs of the raspberry bushes, as he passed, and breaking them off. Then a low angry exclamation reached them.

"You devil, how dare you!"

Natalya jumped up in alarm.

"It's mother!"

Pyotr thrust his head out of the window, completely blocking it up with his broad back as he did so, and saw that his father was holding his mother-in-law in his arms, and pressing her against the wall of the bath-house, in an attempt to throw her to the ground. She was waving her arms about violently and hitting him on the head.

"Let me go or I shall scream," she said in a loud whisper, as she panted for breath.

And in a voice quite unlike her own, she called out:

"My dear, don't touch me! Have pity on me."

Pyotr shut the window without a sound, seized hold of his wife and set her on his knee.

"Don't look!"

"Who is it?" she screamed, struggling in his arms.

"Father," said Pyotr, holding her firmly. "Don't you understand that . . ."

"O! what an awful thing!" she whispered in shame and fear.

"We must not judge our parents," said her husband humbly, as he carried her over to the bed.

But Natalya had clasped her hands behind her head and was rocking herself to and fro, moaning:

"What a terrible sin!"

"It is not our sin," said Pyotr; and he recalled his father's words: "The gentry do still worse things!"

"Even when they were dancing," said his wife through her



tears, "I kept wondering to myself what would happen if he forced her to yield to him."

Exhausted by her agitation she soon fell asleep, without even undressing, but Pyotr opened the window and looked at the garden. There was no one there, only the sigh of the breeze which comes before dawn and the stir of the trees in the stifling darkness. Leaving the window open, he lay down beside his wife, not to shut his eyes but to think over what had happened. How good it would be to live alone with Natalya on a small farm!

Natalya soon woke up, for it seemed to her that the pity she felt for her mother and the wrong she had received prevented her from sleeping. Barefooted and dressed only in a chemise, she ran downstairs. The door of her mother's room, which was always shut at night, was half-open, and this frightened her still more. But on glancing at the corner where her mother's bed stood, she saw a lump under the white sheets and dark hair spread over the pillow.

"She is asleep," thought Natalya. "She has cried and grieved too much already."

Something must be done. Some comfort must be given to her injured mother. She went into the garden. Cold and wet with dew, the grass tickled her legs, and the sun, already almost warm, though it had only just risen up over the forests, blinded her eyes with its slanting rays. She picked a burdock leaf that was silvery with dew and laid it first on one cheek and then on the other. Then, having refreshed her face, she began collecting clusters of red currants on the leaf, while she thought dispassionately about her father-in-law, and of how he used to slap her on the back with his heavy hand and ask with a smile:

"Well, and how are you? Still breathing? That's right, enjoy your life!"

This was apparently the only conversation he had for her, but she was sometimes offended by his affectionate slaps, thinking they were more fit for horses.

"What a ruffian!" she thought, forcing herself to take an unfriendly view of her father-in-law.

Chaffinches were singing, siskins were twittering, and the leaves of the trees were making a soft, silken rustle. Far away, at the edge of the town, a shepherd was playing on his pipe, and from the bank of the Vataraksha, where the factory was rising up, the sound of men's voices came floating slowly through the calm bright air. Something snapped and Natalya trembled and raised her head. Above her, on a branch of an apple tree hung a snare for birds, with a siskin struggling among its slender twigs.

"Who can be catching it?" she thought. "Nikita?" and a dry branch cracked somewhere.

When she returned to the house, she peeped into her mother's room and saw her lying on her back, awake. Ulyana raised her eyebrows in surprise and flung an arm behind her head.

"Who . . . er . . . what are you doing?" she asked anxiously, raising herself on her elbow.

"Nothing. Look! I have brought you some currants for tea."

On a table at her bedside stood a large decanter of kvass, which was nearly empty; and Natalya noticed that the kvass had been spilt on the tablecloth and that the stopper of the decanter was lying on the floor. Though her mother's clear, stern eyes were encircled with a ring of blue shadow, they were not swollen with crying as Natalya expected to see them. They seemed, too, to have grown darker and more sunken, and their usually rather arrogant expression had given place to-day to a far-away, wandering look.

"The gnats keep me awake. I shall go and sleep in the barn," said her mother, muffling her neck in the sheets. "They have bitten me. But what are you up so early for? Why do you walk barefoot in the dew? The edge of your chemise is quite wet. You will catch cold."

Her mother spoke unkindly, unwilling to break the train of her thoughts by talking, and by degrees Natalya's anxiety gave place to keen and hostile feminine curiosity.

"I woke up," she explained. "I was thinking about you. . . . I saw you in a dream."

"Why were you thinking about me?" inquired her mother, looking at the ceiling.

"Because you were sleeping by yourself, without me there. . . ."

It seemed to Natalya that a flush came over her mother's cheeks and that her smile, when she said she was not nervous, was unnatural.

"Now go, dear," she commanded, closing her eyes. "Your husband is awake. Don't you hear him tramping about?"

As she slowly climbed the stairs, Natalya thought with an aversion which amounted almost to hostility:

"He spent the night with her. It was he who drank the kvass. Her neck is covered with spots not because of gnat-bites, but because of his kisses. I shan't tell Pyotr about it. She wants to sleep in the barn now, but last night she was screaming. . . ."

"Where have you been?" asked Pyotr, looking sharply at his wife's face. She dropped her eyes, feeling that she was somehow at fault.

"I have been picking currants, and I went in to see mother."

"Well, how is she?"

"All right, I think. . . ."

"Oh," said Pyotr, pulling at his ear, "so that's it!" And he smiled and rubbed the dark red hair on his chin.

"That fool Barskaya," he thought with a sigh, "was evidently telling the truth when she said, 'Don't believe in screams and don't believe in tears.'"

"Did you see Nikita?" he asked severely.

"No."

"How was that? Look, there he is catching birds in the garden!"

"Oi!" cried Natalya in alarm. "And I was walking about with nothing on but a chemise!"

"So you see. . . ."

"And when does he sleep then?"

Pyotr, who was putting on his boots, merely gave a loud grunt, and his wife smiled as she glanced sideways at him.

"He is a hunchback, but he is nice," she said, "nicer than Alexei."

Her husband gave another grunt, this time not so loud.

Every day at sunrise, when the shepherd played a mournful tune on his long birch-bark pipe, as he collected his flock, the sound of axes made itself heard across the river; and as they drove their cows and sheep out into the street, the inhabitants of the town would say mockingly to one another:

"Hark! They are chopping already and the day has not even begun!"

"Greed is the fierce foe of rest."

Sometimes Ilya Artamonov imagined that he had overcome the indolent hostility of the town. Dryomov men would respectfully take their caps off to him and listen attentively to his stories about the Ratski Princes, yet almost always one or other of them would remark, not without pride:

"Our masters are simpler, poorer, and stricter than yours!"

On the evening of a holiday, as he sat in the beautiful, luxuriant garden of Barski's inn on the bank of the Oka, he would talk to the wealthy and influential men in Dryomov.

"My business will bring profit to all of you."

"Let us hope so!" replied Pomyalov, smiling his brief, dog-like smile, from which it was impossible to make out whether he was going to lick you or bite you. His battered face was ill-concealed by a stubby beard, his grey nose sniffed suspiciously into everything, and a malignant expression lurked in his acorn-coloured eyes.

"Let us hope so!" he repeated. "We have not done badly without you, and we may still fare quite as well now you are here."

Artamonov frowned.

"What you say is ambiguous and unfriendly."

Barski roared with laughter and shouted:

"That's his way."

Barski's face was a botched-up affair consisting of lumps of purple flesh. All the rest of him—his enormous head, his neck, cheeks and arms—was covered with a thick coat of

coarse-haired fur like a bear. His ears were invisible, and his eyes, hidden in pincushions of fat, were of no use to him.

"All my strength has run to fat," he would say, and opening his mouth wide and revealing a pair of jaws full of blunt teeth, he would go off into fits of laughter.

Voroponov the cartwright used to watch Artamonov with his very light-coloured eyes.

"We ought to do our work," he would say in his rather dry voice, "but at the same time we ought not to forget God. The Scripture says: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful.'"

Voroponov's tight, vacant eyes always looked as if he had just received an inspiration and were about to astound his listeners with some extraordinary statement. Sometimes he would begin to say something like this:

"Of course Christ used to eat bread, so that Martha . . ."

But Zhiteikin the tanner, who was also churchwarden, would stop him with: "Come, come, what are you talking about?"

And Voroponov would relapse into silence and twitch his grey ears.

"Do you understand my business?" Ilya used to ask him.

"Why should he?" Zhiteikin would inquire in real astonishment. "It's your business, you funny fellow, and it's for you to understand it. Your business for you and mine for me!"

As he drank his thick beer, Artamonov would gaze through the trees at the muddy strip of the Oka, and at a spot on one side of it, a little to the left, where the Vataraksha, after winding along like an ornamental green snake, crept out from among the firwoods and the marshes. There, on the spit of gold-brocaded sand, where chips and shavings of wood shine like oil, and bricks glow red, the long flesh-coloured factory lies stretched among the trampled willow bushes, like a coffin without a lid. There, the warehouse, with its dull covering of iron, as yet unpainted, glows in the sun, and the yellow framework of the two-storied house melts

away like wax, as it lifts up its tight-stretched golden rafters into the hot sky. Alexei once remarked that from a distance the house looked like a psaltery. He is living there now, so as to be a little farther away from the young men and the girls of the town, with whom his outbursts of temper make him unpopular. Pyotr is more stolid than his brother, and being somewhat thick-witted, does not yet realize how much a bold man can do.

A shadow passes across Artamonov's face, and he smiles as he looks at the townspeople from under his thick eyebrows, thinking them a cheap lot, with their half-hearted eagerness for work and complete lack of real enthusiasm.

At night when the town is dead asleep, he slinks along the river bank, past the back-yards and into Widow Baimakova's garden. Gnats hum in the warm air, creating the illusion that it is they who are filling the countryside with the delicious scent of cucumbers, apples, and fennel. The moon floats among grey clouds and their shadows glide over the river. Stepping across the wattle hedge which bounds the garden, Artamonov passes through into the court-yard, and now he is in the store-house, from a corner of which issues a cautious whisper :

"Did you get here without being seen ?"

"I dislike having to hide," he mutters angrily, as he throws off his clothes. "I'm not a boy, am I ?"

"Then don't have a sweetheart."

"I should be glad not to, but the Lord has brought me one."

"O*i*, how can you say that, you heretic, when we are both acting against God's will ! . . ."

"It's all right. Think about that afterwards. *Ekh*, Ulyana, the people here are . . ."

"There, that's enough, don't worry yourself," she whispers, and with passionate eagerness she goes on soothing him for a long time with her caresses. Then she gives him detailed information about the people in the town, and tells him whom he must beware of, who is clever, who dishonest, and who has money to spare.

## DECADENCE

"Pomyalov and Voroponov, knowing that you need a lot of firewood, want to buy up the woods in the neighbourhood, so as to squeeze money out of you."

"They are too late. The prince has already sold the woods to me."

Round them and above them the darkness is so impenetrable that they cannot even see each other's eyes, and they talk in noiseless whispers. There is a smell of hay and birch brooms, and from the ice-house below rises a pleasant stream of damp, cool air. A leaden silence envelops the little town. Now and then a rat scurries by or some young mice squeak, and every hour the cracked bell in the belfry of St. Nicholas's church flings out its mournful, quavering sounds into the darkness.

He was conscious of feeling stronger and wiser for being with this woman, who during the day was a calm, quiet, sensible housewife, much respected in the town for her good sense and for knowing how to read and write.

"I know how you feel," he said once, touched by her girlish caresses. "We married our children without thinking, whereas we ought to have married ourselves."

"Yours are nice children. Even if they find out about us, there won't be any harm done, but if the town finds out . . ."

And she shuddered all over.

"Don't worry about that," whispered Ilya.

One day she was full of curiosity.

"Tell me, you've killed a man, haven't you? Now, don't you dream about him?"

Ilya scratched his beard unconcernedly and replied:

"No. I'm a sound sleeper and I don't dream. Besides, why should I dream about him, when I never even saw what he was like? Some men struck a blow at me which nearly knocked me down, and so I hit one of them with a *kistyen*, then another, and a third ran away."

He sighed and murmured in an injured tone:

"Fools come and strike you, and then you have to answer to God for them!"

He lay for a few minutes without speaking.

"Asleep?" she asked.

"No."

"Then go. It will soon begin to get light. Are you going to where they are building?"

He goes out into the chilly, mother-of-pearl darkness of the early morning and walks over his property, his hands thrust behind his back under his coat, which sticks out behind him like a cock's tail.

"I ought to let Olyoshka go about more," he thinks to himself, crushing the chips and shavings of wood beneath his heavy feet, "and allow the froth to come away. He is a difficult boy, but good at heart."

He lies down either on the sand or on a heap of wood-shavings, and soon goes to sleep. Meanwhile the gentle glow of dawn begins to spread over the greenish-coloured sky, and now the sun proudly unfolds its peacock's tail of rays over the earth, and rises up itself, like a golden ball. The workmen wake up, see Artamonov's large form stretched upon the ground, and inform one another of the fact.

"Look there!" they say.

Tikhon Vyalov, a man with high cheek-bones, who is carrying an iron spade on his shoulder, looks at him with twinkling eyes, as if he wanted to step over him, but were hesitating to do so.

Though human beings were bustling about like ants, their shouting and knocking failed to wake up the big man, who lay, face upwards to the sky, snoring like a blunt saw, and the labourer went away looking back over his shoulder and blinking as if he had received a blow on the head.

Alexei came out of the house, dressed in a white linen shirt and dark blue drawers, and went off to bathe as lightly as if he were treading on air, circling cautiously round his father for fear the gentle crack of shavings beneath his feet might wake him. Nikita had gone off, while it was still hardly light, into the forest, whence he brought nearly every day two cart-loads of leaf-mould, which he unloaded in the place that had been cleared for a garden. He had already planted birch trees, maples, mountain ashes and bird-cherry trees, and



now he was digging deep holes in the sand and filling them up with leaf-mould, mud and clay, to prepare the ground for fruit trees. Tikhon Vyalov used to help him with his work on holidays.

"Planting gardens can't be objected to," he would say.

Pyotr Artamonov, pulling his ear, would come and watch the work which proceeded apace to the accompaniment of the succulent snoring of the saw as it ate its way into the wood, the hissing and scraping of planes, the ringing blows of axes, the pleasant smacking sound of wet lime, and the sobbing of the whetstone as it licked the edge of the axe. The carpenters were singing "the Dubinushka" as they lifted a beam, and a young voice struck up in a ringing tone:

"Old man Zakhari came to Mary  
And showed his fist, did old man Zakhari. . . ."

"A coarse song," said Pyotr to Vyalov the labourer.

"It does not matter what they sing," replied the other, kneeling on the sand.

"Why not?"

"The words have no soul."

"The peasant is beyond comprehension," thought Pyotr, as he left him, and he remembered that when his father had offered Vyalov a post as superintendent of the work, the labourer had looked down at his father's feet and replied:

"No, I am no use for that. I can't keep the men in order, but take me on as *dvornik*," for which his father had reprimanded him severely.

Autumn came on, damp and chilly. The gardens were covered with rust-red, and reddish spots began to show themselves in the iron blackness of the forests, and they too took on a rusty appearance. A damp wind began to whistle, driving the crushed white shavings into the river, and every morning carts, drawn by shaggy horses, drove up to the barn laden with flax. Pyotr used to receive the stores, keeping a careful watch on these surly, bearded peasants to see that they neither brought in damp flax on the sly, having previously soaked some in water to make their loads weigh heavier, nor

sold ordinary flax at the price of the best kind. He had a difficult time with the peasants, for Alexei was impatient, and used to swear at them furiously, and his father had gone away to Moscow, his mother-in-law having followed him, on the pretence of making a pilgrimage.

"It is tedious living here," Alexei would complain angrily at tea and supper in the evening. "And I don't like the people." These remarks always irritated Pyotr.

"You are a fine specimen yourself! You exasperate everybody and you love boasting."

"I have something to boast about, that's why I do it."

With a shake of his curls, he would square his shoulders, arch out his chest and insolently look at his brothers and his sister-in-law through half-closed eyes. Natalya used to speak coldly to him and avoid his company, as though there were something about him which frightened her.

After dinner, when her husband and Alexei had gone to work again, she used to take her sewing into Nikita's little monastic room and seat herself at the window in an arm-chair. Here the hunchback, who fulfilled the duties of a clerk, wrote and made calculations from morning to night, but whenever Natalya appeared he interrupted his work to tell her stories of the lives that the princes led, and of the flowers which grew in their greenhouses. His high, girlish voice sounded strained and tender, and his blue eyes would gaze past her face at the window, while she bent over her sewing in thoughtful silence, like someone who is quite alone. They would sit for an hour or two, almost without looking at each other: though from time to time Nikita would steal a cautious and almost involuntary glance at his sister-in-law, and at such times his blue eyes caressed her with tender warmth and his large, dog-like ears turned perceptibly pink. His passing glance sometimes compelled her to return his look and give him a gracious smile—a strange smile which sometimes made Nikita feel that she guessed the cause of his excitement. Sometimes too it seemed to him a wounded as well as a wounding smile, and then he dropped his eyes guiltily.

Outside the window the rain hisses and splashes down,

washing out the faded colours of the summer, and through it can be heard the shouting of Alexei, the growls of the little bear which has lately been chained up in a corner of the yard, and the sound of the women scutchers beating flax. Alexei enters noisily. He is wet and dirty and his cap is on the back of his head. All the same he reminds them of a spring day, as he laughingly tells them that Tikhon Vyalov has cut off one of his fingers with an axe.

"It seems to have been an accident, but it is a fact that he was afraid of being recruited for the army. I wish I could be a soldier, if only for the sake of getting away from here!"

He frowns and growls like the little bear.

"We have come to the back of beyond."

Then he stretches out his hand imperiously.

"Give me fifteen kopeks. I am going to the town."

"What for?"

"It's not your business."

And he goes out singing:

"Along the path the maiden runs  
To take her love a dish of buns."

"Oh, he'll come to a bad end!" says Natalya. "My friends often see him with Olgunka Orlova, who is only fourteen, and has no mother and a drunken father. . . ."

Nikita does not like her talking like this, for he detects too much grief and anxiety in her words, and even a shadow of jealousy.

He gazes silently out of the window, where the boughs of the pine-tree are swaying in the wet, and flinging raindrops from their green needles like quicksilver. It is he who has planted the pines: in fact all the trees round the house have been planted by his hands.

Pyotr comes in, cross and tired.

"It is time to drink tea, Natalya."

"It is early yet."

"It's time, I say!" he shouts, and as soon as his wife goes out, he sits down in her place and grumbles and complains in his turn.

"Father has put all this work on my shoulders. I roll round like a wheel, but where I am going, I have no idea. Yet if things don't go right, he'll come down on me."

Gently and cautiously Nikita tells him about Alexei and the girl Orlova, but his brother waves him away and shows he has obviously not been listening.

"I have no time to admire girls. Even my wife I only see at night through my dreams, and in the daytime I am as blind as an owl. You've got this nonsense on your brain. . . ."

And pulling his ear, he goes on cautiously:

"This factory is not the work for us. It would be far better for us to go to the steppes, buy land there and work it ourselves like peasants. There would be less talk, and more sense in it."

Ilya Artamonov returned home gay and rejuvenated. He had trimmed his beard; his shoulders had grown even broader and his eyes brighter, and altogether he looked like a newly repaired plough.

"Our business must go forward like an army," he said, stretching himself on the sofa like a gentleman. "There is enough work for you, your children and grandchildren. Enough for three hundred years. We Artamonovs must prove ourselves a great ornament to industrialism!"

He cast his eyes over his daughter-in-law and called out:

"You are getting big, Natalya, aren't you? If you have a son, I will give you a fine present."

"Father is nice when he is in good spirits," said Natalya to her husband that evening as they were getting ready to go to bed.

Her husband looked askance at her.

"Naturally you think him nice, when he promises you a present," he declared unkindly.

But in two or three weeks' time Artamonov became silent and thoughtful.

"Why is father angry?" Natalya inquired of Nikita.

"I don't know. One can't understand him."

That very evening, at tea, Alexei said in a loud, clear voice:

"Father, let me be a soldier."

## DECADENCE

"W-why?" stuttered Ilya.

"I don't want to live here. . . ."

"Go away!" Artamonov commanded his children, but when Alexei also went to the door, he called out: "Stop, Olyoshka!"

For a long time he contemplated the lad, his eyebrows moving, his arms held behind his back.

"And I thought you were my eagle!" he said at last.

"I can't get accustomed to this place."

"That's a lie. Your place is here. Your mother handed you over to me to do what I wished with you. Go!"

Alexei strode off like a man in bondage, but his uncle seized him by the shoulder.

"I oughtn't to have talked to you like this. My father used to talk to me with his fist. Go!"

Then calling to him once more, he added in an insinuating tone: "You must be a great man, do you understand? Don't let me hear any more whining from you in future."

Left alone, he stood for a long time at the window, holding his beard tightly in his fist and looking at the wet grey snow falling on the ground, and as soon as it grew dark as a cellar outside the window he went to the town. Ulyana's courtyard gates were already locked, so he tapped at a window and Ulyana opened the door to him herself.

"Why have you come so late?" she asked discontentedly.

Without answering her or taking his coat off, he went through into the room, and throwing his cap on the floor, sat down and leant his elbows on the table, burying his fingers in his beard.

"He is a stranger," he said, as he told her about Alexei. "My sister had an affair with a gentleman and it is showing itself in the boy."

The woman looked to see if the shutters were properly fastened and put out the candle. In one corner a dark blue lamp was burning before the ikons in a silver stand.

"Get him married quickly," she said. "That will settle him."

"Yes, I must. Only that is not all. Pyotr has no enthusiasm,

that's the trouble with him. He does his work as if he had no interest in it himself, but were still a serf and had a master to work for. He is not conscious of his freedom, do you understand? I won't say anything about Nikita. He's a cripple and can think of nothing but gardens and flowers. But I was expecting Alexei to get his teeth into the business. . . ."

Ulyana tried to soothe him.

"You are alarming yourself too early. Wait till the wheel of work begins to turn round faster, then it will run over them all and make them like putty."

They went on talking till midnight, sitting side by side in the warm, quiet room, in a corner of which hovered a misty cloud of dark blue light and a flower of fire quivered timidly. In his complaints about his children's lack of enthusiasm for business, Artamonov did not forget the townsfolk.

"They are people with mean minds," he said.

"They don't like you because you are successful. We women love success, but to your sex the success of a stranger is an eyesore."

Ulyana Baimakova knew how to comfort and soothe him.

"In Moscow business progresses like a house on fire!" he continued, getting up and embracing her. "*Ekh*, if you were only a man!"

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, "and be off with you!"

He kissed her warmly and went.

At Shrovetide Erdanskaya brought Alexei back from the town on a sledge, covered with bruises and unconscious, with his clothes in ribbons. For a long time she and Nikita rubbed his body with grated horse-radish and vodka, but he only groaned and did not say a word. Artamonov was meanwhile pacing up and down the room like a wild animal; grinding his teeth, rolling up his shirt-sleeves and then pulling them down again. As soon as Alexei recovered his senses, he began shouting and shaking his fist at him.

"Who has done this to you? Tell me!"

With a pitiful effort, Alexei half-opened an angry, swollen eye.

"Finish me off . . ." he said hoarsely, gasping for breath and spitting blood.

At this Natalya took fright and began crying loudly, but her father-in-law stamped his foot at her and called out :

"Shut up! Get out!"

Meanwhile Alexei kept on groaning and taking hold of his head with his hands, as if he wanted to tear it off. Then he stretched his arms out, fell over on his side and lay still, breathing hoarsely with his blood-stained mouth open. A candle flickered on a table by his bedside, and as the shadows crept over his battered body, he seemed all the time to be growing blacker and more swollen. At his feet stood his brothers, crushed and silent, and his father paced about the room, asking :

"Will he die, do you think?"

But in eight days' time Alexei got up, coughing and spitting blood. He began drinking vodka with pepper in it, and frequenting the bath-house where he used to steam himself; and in his eyes there glowed dark and sullen fires, which made them even more beautiful than before. He was unwilling to say who had thrashed him, but Erdanskaya knew it was Styepan Barski, assisted by two firemen and Voroponov's *dvornik*, who was a Mordvinian. When Artamonov asked Alexei whether this was true, he replied :

"I don't know."

"That's a lie!"

"I didn't see them. They came up behind me and threw a coat or something over my head."

"You are hiding something," hazarded Artamonov. But Alexei merely looked him in the face with his unwholesomely burning eyes and said :

"I am getting better."

"You must eat more!" Artamonov advised him, and muttered in his beard: "For doing a thing like that, they deserve to have their houses burnt down, and their hands roasted. . . ."

He became still more considerate, treated Alexei with rough kindness and worked for the sake of showing he was

## DECADENCE

working, making no attempt to conceal his aim, which was—to inspire his children with a passion for labour.

“Do everything yourselves and think nothing beneath you!” he would tell them, and himself did a great deal that he need not have done, displaying on all occasions the sharp-sighted cleverness of a wild animal, which enabled him to determine where resistance was most stubborn, and how to overcome it in the easiest possible way.

His daughter-in-law’s pregnancy was prolonged beyond the usual limits, and when at last, after two days and two nights of torture, Natalya gave birth to a girl, he said sadly:

“Now, what’s the use of that?”

“Thank God for His goodness,” was Ulyana’s stern advice. “To-day is the feast of St. Helen of the Flax.”

“Is it really?”

And seizing hold of the Church Calendar, he glanced at it and exclaimed with childish delight:

“Take me to your daughter!”

On her breast he laid a pair of ruby ear-rings and five three-rouble pieces.

“They are for you!” he cried. “Even though you haven’t borne a son, it is quite all right.”

“Well, are you glad, you sheat-fish?” he asked Pyotr. “I was, when you were born.”

Pyotr was gazing in alarm at his wife’s tortured, bloodless face, now almost unrecognizable. Her tired, sunken eyes, set in their black hollows, looked upon people and things as if they were trying to recall some long-forgotten scene, and her tongue moved slowly round her lips, licking the places that were bitten.

“Why doesn’t she speak?” he asked his mother-in-law.

“She is exhausted with screaming,” explained Ulyana, as she pushed him out of the room.

For two nights and two days he had listened to his wife’s wails. At first he had pitied her and been afraid of her dying; but afterwards, deafened by her cries and bewildered by the commotion in the house, he had grown tired of fearing and



pitying, and had tried only to escape beyond the reach of her groans. But in this he failed, because her moans went on echoing inside his head and stirring up an extraordinary train of thought. And wherever he went, he saw Nikita the hunchback, armed with an axe or an iron spade, either cutting or trimming, or digging holes; running about as noiselessly as a mole and apparently, since Pyotr encountered him everywhere, moving round in a circle.

"I don't think she'll be delivered," said Pyotr to his brother.

"What does the midwife say?" asked the hunchback, planting his spade in the sand.

"She is consoling and promises that it will be all right. Why are you trembling?"

"I have got toothache."

On the evening of the baby's birth, Pyotr sat on the steps of the house with Nikita and Tikhon.

"When my mother-in-law laid my daughter in my arms," he told them with a thoughtful smile, "I was so delighted that I did not feel her weight and nearly threw her up to the ceiling. It is hard to realize that a small thing like that can cause such terrible pain."

Tikhon Vyalov scratched his cheek-bone and said in the quiet tone in which he always spoke:

"All human pain is caused by small things."

"Why is that?" asked Nikita sternly.

"It is like that. One can't tell why," replied the *dvornik*, yawning unconcernedly.

And then someone indoors called them in to supper.

The baby was big and heavy when it was born, but in five months it died of suffocation by charcoal fumes, and its mother also nearly died at the same time.

"Well, what does it matter?" his father said consolingly to Pyotr at the cemetery. "She'll have another. And as for us, we shall have our own grave here now, which means that our anchor is cast deep. When what is with you is yours and what is under you is yours—when what is on the earth is yours and what is under the earth is yours—then you are firmly established in a place."

Pyotr nodded his head and looked at his wife. With her back bent in an awkward curve, she was gazing down at her feet, at the little mound which Nikita was absorbedly patting with a spade, and brushing away the tears from her cheeks with a quick, convulsive movement of her fingers, as if she were afraid of burning them against her swollen red nose.

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord! . . ." she kept whispering.

Alexei, who had grown thinner and looked older than his years, was walking about among the crosses and reading the epitaphs on them. There was nothing peasant-like about his face, and the dark hair which grew upon it gave it the appearance of having been scorched and blackened with smoke. His insolent eyes, sunk deep beneath his black eyebrows, looked out with enmity upon the world, and when he spoke, it was in a dull, pompous voice, as if he were making himself indistinct on purpose.

"Don't you understand?" he would scream out, when asked to repeat anything.

He also used to swear. There was something ill-natured and contemptuous in his attitude to his brothers, and he would shout at Natalya as though she were a work-woman.

"You insult her for no reason," Nikita once said to him in expostulation.

"I'm a sick man," he replied.

"She is so gentle."

"Well, then let her put up with it."

To the fact that he was ill, Alexei made constant reference and almost always with pride, as if there were some particular merit in being ill, which distinguished him from other people.

"We ought to make a churchyard of our own," he said to his uncle as he walked beside him on their way back from the cemetery, "for it will be a disgrace to lie among these people even when one is dead."

Artamonov smiled.

"Yes, we will make one. We'll have everything of our own. We will found a church, a cemetery, a school, and a hospital—you wait!"

As they were crossing the bridge over the Vataraksha, they

saw a beggarly-looking man standing there, holding on to the parapet. He was dressed in a tattered reddish-brown dressing-gown like a civil servant who has spent his last farthing on drink, and his face was covered with stubbly grey bristles. When he moved his hairy lips, he showed stumps of black teeth, and a dull light shone in his watery little eyes. Artamonov turned away and spat, but he noticed that Alexei nodded at the wretched man with a kindness that was unusual to him.

"Who is that?" asked Artamonov.

"Orlov the watchmaker."

"Yes, he is evidently an Orlov!"

"He is intelligent though," persisted Alexei, "he has been hunted down."

Artamonov looked askance at his nephew and said no more.

With the approach of dry, sultry summer weather, fires broke out in the forests across the Oka. During the daytime an opal cloud of acrid smoke rose in a column above the earth, and at night the bald moon looked unpleasantly red, and the stars, shorn of their rays by the mist, loomed out like the heads of copper nails, while the water in the river reflected the troubled sky and gave one the impression of a stream of thick, cold, subterranean smoke.

Finding the heat oppressive, the Artamonovs were drinking tea, after supper, in the garden, in the semicircle of maple trees, which had firmly taken root, though their magnificent crests of patterned leaves could give no shade on a misty night like this. The air resounded with the chirping of crickets, the humming of one-horned, iron-coloured beetles and the singing of the samovar. Natalya had undone the top buttons of her bodice and was silently pouring out tea, the warm colour of the skin on her chest showing like butter. The hunchback sat with bent head, trimming the twigs for his bird snares, and Pyotr was pulling the lobe of his ear.

"It does harm to exasperate people," he said softly, "and father is always doing it."

Alexei was coughing his dry little cough and gazing in the direction of the town, craning his neck as if in expectation of something.

A bell in the town began to ring.

"Is it an alarm bell? A fire?" asked Alexei, putting the palm of his hand to his forehead and jumping up.

"Of course not. It is the bell-ringer striking off the hours."

Alexei got up and went away, and after a short silence Nikita said softly:

"He thinks everything must be a fire."

"He has grown bad-tempered," observed Natalya cautiously.

"And yet how gay he used to be!"

At this Pyotr, as became the eldest, subtly rebuked his brother and his wife:

"You are both taking a very stupid view of him. Your pity is an insult to him! Let us go to bed, Natalya."

They went away and the hunchback remained gazing after them, then he also got up, and going off to the summer-house, where he always slept on a heap of hay, sat down on the doorstep. The summer-house stood on a turf-covered mound, from where the dark cluster of houses which formed the town, and the belfries and the watch-tower which guarded it against fire, might be seen over the tops of the palings. A servant was clearing the tea-things from the table, making a tinkling noise with the cups. Weavers were passing along the palings, one carrying a casting-net, another rattling an iron pail, and a third striking sparks from a flint and trying to kindle the tinder in order to light his pipe. Then a dog gave a growl, and the stillness was broken by Tikhon Vyalov's quiet voice asking:

"Who is there?"

The stillness was drawn tightly over the earth like the parchment of a drum, so that even the faint crunch of sand under the weavers' feet struck on the ear with unpleasant distinctness. To Nikita the soundlessness of the night was a source of great delight. The more complete it was, the more he concentrated the full force of his imagination upon Natalya, and the brighter seemed the shining of her dear eyes that were always a little frightened and surprised. It was easy, too, to imagine various events, all turning out luckily for him: now he had found a very rich treasure which he gave to Pyotr, and in return for

which Pyotr gave Natalya to him. Or they were attacked by robbers and he performed such extraordinary feats of heroism that his father and brother of their own accord gave him Natalya as a reward for his services. Or sickness came upon them, leaving only two members out of the whole family alive—himself and Natalya—and then he would show *her* that her happiness was hidden in his heart.

It was after midnight when he noticed that, over the cluster of houses in the town and the gardens spread out like motionless clouds, another cloud was breaking and slowly rising up into the turbid, dark grey sky. In a moment it was lit up from beneath by a purple glow, and realizing that it was a fire, he ran to the house and caught sight of Alexei rushing up the stairs on to the roof of the barn.

"A fire!" shouted Nikita.

"I know," replied his brother, climbing higher. "What about it?"

"So you were expecting it," said the hunchback reminiscently, standing still with astonishment in the middle of the court-yard.

"And what if I was? In dry weather like this, there are always fires."

"We ought to wake the weavers. . . ."

But they had already been aroused by Tikhon, and one after another they ran to the river, shouting merrily.

"Climb up here," suggested Alexei, sitting astride on the ridge of the roof. The hunchback climbed up obediently, saying:

"If only Natalya weren't frightened!"

"Aren't you afraid of Pyotr giving you another hump?"

"No, why?" asked Nikita quietly, and heard the reply:

"Then don't stare at his wife."

For a long time he could not utter a single word. He seemed to be sliding down the roof and on the point of falling off and striking the ground.

"What are you saying?" he mumbled at last. "If you thought that . . ."

"It's all right, it's all right! I see . . . Don't be afraid,"

said Alexei cheerfully after a long pause. He was gazing under the palms of his hands at the thick tongues of fire which were swaying to and fro and agitating the stillness, making it give out a dull humming sound.

"That's Barski's house burning," he said in an animated tone. "There are twenty barrels of tar in their court-yard, but the fire won't spread to their neighbours because the gardens will prevent it."

"We ought to run and help," thought Nikita as he gazed into the distant darkness, rent by fire. There, in the red air stood trees forged out of iron and small toy-like figures bustled about on the red ground, and one could even see them poking the fire with long, slender hooks.

"A big fire!" exclaimed Alexei approvingly.

"I shall go into a monastery," thought the hunchback.

Pyotr's sleepy, angry murmurs came up from the court-yard and Tikhon Vyalov's words floated idly on the air in reply, while, framed in a window of the house, stood Natalya crossing herself.

Nikita remained sitting on the roof until there was nothing to be seen on the site of the burnt house but a heap of embers sparkling like gold round the black columns of the stove flues. Then he climbed down to the ground and went out of the yard gates. But there he ran into his father who was returning, wet, daubed with soot, and capless, with his coat in rags.

"Where are you going?" he called out with unusual vehemence, as he pushed Nikita back into the court-yard. Then catching sight of Alexei's white figure on the roof, he shouted in a still fiercer and more peremptory tone: "What are you doing up there? Come down! You ought to take care of your health, you fool."

Passing through into the garden, Nikita sat down on a bench under his father's window, and soon heard a door slammed violently and his father's voice asking in a dull undertone:

"Do you want to ruin yourself and cover me with shame? Do you? I'll kill you. . . ."

"You put me up to it yourself," Alexei whined in reply.

"Shut up! Pray God that worthless scamp has lost his tongue."

Nikita got up and quietly but quickly went off to the summer-house in a corner of the garden.

At breakfast next morning, their father told them it was arson.

"The incendiary turned out to be the drunken watchmaker. He has been soundly thrashed and will probably die. Barski or someone had made him bankrupt, and he was also angry with Barski's son Styepka. A shady business!"

Alexei went on quietly drinking his milk, but Nikita, feeling that his hands were shaking, put them between his knees and squeezed them hard. His father noticed the movement and asked:

"What are you hunching yourself up for?"

"I'm not well."

"None of you are well, I am the only healthy one," and pushing his untouched glass of tea angrily away, he left them.

Artamonov's business rapidly attracted a population, and two versts away from the factory, small, squat huts sprang up on the little heather-covered hills and among the sparse pine-woods—huts without court-yards or wattle hedges, looking from a distance like bee-hives. For his bachelor-workmen and those without families Artamonov built long barracks, overlooking a shallow ravine, once the bed of a river, which had long since dried up and the name of which had been forgotten. The roof was built on a single slant with three chimneys rising from it, and the windows were made small in order to keep the heat in. These gave the barracks the appearance of a stable, whence their quarters were called by the workmen the "Stallions' Palace."

Though Ilya Artamonov became more and more boastful and noisy, he never acquired the arrogant manner of a rich man and always behaved simply towards his workmen, joining in their wedding festivities and standing godfather to their children. On holidays he was fond of chatting with the old weavers, who told him he ought to advise the peasants to sow flax in ploughed fields which had lain fallow and in

places where there had been forest fires, and this proved very successful. The old weavers were delighted at their master's condescension, seeing in him a peasant on whom fortune was smiling graciously.

"Look, how business ought to be conducted!" they would say didactically to the young men.

And Ilya Artamonov taught his children that, as workmen, peasants were more intelligent than townsmen.

"Townpeople are weak in body, dissipated in mind, avaricious and yet timid. Everything they do is petty and transient, and they have no moderation. But a peasant keeps strictly within the bounds of reality and is not carried away first in one direction and then in another. Reality for him is something simple: God, for instance, bread, and the Tsar. He is entirely simple. Stick to him. You, Pyotr, speak coldly to the workmen and always talk about business. That's no use. You must be able to chatter to them about trivial things. Make jokes with them. A jolly fellow is better understood."

"I don't know how to make a joke," said Pyotr and, as was his habit, he pulled his ear.

"You must learn. A joke only lasts a minute, but its effect goes on for an hour. Alexei isn't easy with the men either. He is too ready to shout at them and find fault."

"They are cheats and idlers," declared Alexei irritably.

"You know a lot about them, don't you?" Artamonov shouted sternly. Nevertheless he smiled into his beard, and that his smile might not be noticed, covered it with his hand; for he remembered the fearlessness and intelligence which Alexei had shown in a dispute with the townpeople about the cemetery. The Dryomov people had been unwilling to bury his workmen in their cemetery, and he had been obliged to buy a large piece of ground in some alder-woods and there lay out a cemetery of his own.

"A cemetery!" reflected Tikhon Vyalov as he and Nikita were cutting down the slender, weedy-looking trees. "We don't call things by their right names. A cemetery is called a trysting-place, and yet people stay there for ever and ever. Trysting-places are houses and towns."



Nikita could see from the easy, skilful way in which Vyalov worked, that he showed more intelligence in manual labour than in the dark sayings which he uttered so unexpectedly. Vyalov, like his father, was quick to find the point of least resistance in everything he attacked, and having found it, he husbanded his strength and won by guile. Nevertheless there was a striking difference between them. While his father undertook every task with ardour, Vyalov worked, not as if he wanted to, but as if he were conferring a favour, like a man who knows he is capable of better things. And he spoke in the same way as he worked ; the little he said being condescending, expressive and insinuating, with a shade of carelessness about it.

"I know a lot more," he seemed to say, "and I can tell you something better still."

And in Vyalov's words Nikita could always detect suggestions that roused in him a sense of vexation and fear and also filled him with a keen, disquieting curiosity about him.

"You know a lot," he said to him, and Vyalov replied leisurely :

"That's what I live for. I know it doesn't do any harm, because I keep my knowledge to myself. It is hidden away in a miser's chest and isn't seen by anybody. So don't be uneasy."

Without their noticing it, Tikhon used to try and find out what people were thinking about. He merely fixed the importunate gaze of his twinkling, bird-like eyes on someone, and then suddenly began talking of things he ought not to have known, as if he had read the thoughts in the other's brain. Sometimes Nikita wished that Vyalov would bite his tongue off, or that he would cut it off just as he had cut off his finger—and even this he had done badly, for he had cut off the fourth finger on his left hand instead of one of the fingers on his right hand. Pyotr and his father and everyone else considered him stupid, but Nikita thought otherwise. A queer feeling of curiosity about Tikhon kept rising up in him, and he experienced a growing dread of this incomprehensible peasant with his prominent cheek-bones, a dread which

was still further increased by Vyalov suddenly remarking to him, as they were returning together from the forest:

"You are pining away. You should tell her, you queer fellow, and perhaps she will take pity on you. She seems to be a kind-hearted woman."

The hunchback stood still. His heart stopped beating with fright and his legs turned to stone, as he muttered distractedly:

"What am I to tell whom?"

Vyalov threw him a glance and strode on farther, and when Nikita seized him by the shirt-sleeve, he disdainfully drew his arm away.

"Well, why pretend it isn't so?"

Nikita flung from his shoulder the birch tree which he had dug up in the forest, and looked round. He longed to strike Tikhon on his shaggy face, longed to make him be quiet; but the other continued to gaze into the distance with half-closed eyes and went on talking in his usual way.

"And even if she isn't kind-hearted, she can pretend to be so for an hour. Women are full of curiosity and every one of them wants to see what another man is like, and to find out if there is anything sweeter than sugar. Our sex does not want much. But you are pining away. You try and tell her about it. Perhaps she'll consent."

To Nikita his words seemed to be prompted by a feeling of friendly pity. It was something new and unknown to him and a lump rose in his throat; yet at the same time Tikhon seemed to be stripping him and revealing him in all his nakedness.

"What nonsense you have invented!" he said.

In the town the bells were ringing out their summons to late Mass. Tikhon gave a shake to the saplings on his shoulder, and went along, banging his iron spade on the ground and talking in the same quiet tone.

"Don't be afraid of me. I am sorry for you, you know. You are a nice, interesting fellow. All you Artamonovs are awfully interesting. And though you are a hunchback, you are not like one in character."

Nikita's fright dissolved itself in burning grief, which made

everything swim before his eyes. He began to stumble like a drunken man and wanted to lie down and rest.

"Don't say anything about this," he implored softly.

"I told you all I knew was locked up in a chest."

"Forget about it. Don't blurt it out by accident."

"I never speak to her. What have I to speak to her about?"

And they went all the way home in silence. The hunchback's dark blue eyes gradually grew larger, rounder and sadder. He began to look past people, over their shoulders, and became more silent and inconspicuous than ever. Natalya however noticed that something was the matter.

"Why do you look so melancholy?" she inquired.

"I have a lot to do," replied Nikita, and went away quickly. This offended Natalya, for it was not the first time she had noticed that her brother-in-law was no longer as kind to her as he had been. She was bored by the life she led. In four years she had given birth to two girls, and now she was pregnant once more.

"Why do you always have girls? What am I to do with them?" grumbled her father-in-law when the second was born, and he omitted to give her a present.

"I want grandsons," he complained to Pyotr, "not husbands for my granddaughters. What's the use of building up a business for strangers?"

Every word uttered by her father-in-law forced Natalya to realize that she was to blame. She knew too that her husband was dissatisfied with her; and as she lay beside him in bed, she would gaze out of the window at the distant stars and stroke her stomach and offer up her secret prayer.

"Lord, give me a son. . . ."

Yet there were times when she longed to shout out at her husband and father-in-law:

"I'm doing it on purpose. I'll have daughters just to spite you!"

She longed to do something astonishing and completely unexpected—either something good so as to make people kinder to her, or something spiteful so as to frighten them all. But she could not think of anything either good or bad.

Rising at dawn, she would go down to the kitchen, help the cook to prepare breakfast and run upstairs again to feed the children. Then she would get breakfast ready for her father-in-law, husband and brothers-in-law, and once more feed her little girls. After that she used to sew and mend every one's linen, and after dinner go into the garden with the children and sit there all the afternoon until tea-time. The cheeky women who wound the thread on spools, would peep into the garden and praise her little girls' beauty in flattering terms; and though Natalya smiled, she was not convinced by their praises, for she herself did not think her children good-looking.

Sometimes Nikita appeared for a moment among the trees, the one person who had been kind to her, but nowadays when she invited him to come and sit with her, he replied guiltily :

"Excuse me, I haven't the time."

The mortifying idea imperceptibly took shape in her mind that the hunchback had only pretended to be kind to her, but that really he had been set over her by her husband as a guard, to keep watch on her and Alexei. She was afraid of Alexei because he attracted her, and knew well that if her handsome brother-in-law wanted her she would not be able to resist him. But he did not want her, did not even notice her, and this also hurt her feelings and filled her with animosity against the forward and insolent Alexei.

At five o'clock they drank tea; at eight they had supper, after which Natalya washed and fed the children and put them to bed. She spent a long time on her knees, saying her prayers, and then lay down beside her husband in the hope of conceiving a son. If her husband wanted her, he muttered from the bed :

"That's enough. Come and lie down."

And hastily crossing herself, she would break off her prayers and go to him and submissively lie down. Sometimes, but very rarely, Pyotr used to laugh at her.

"Why do you pray so much? If you get everything you pray for, there won't be enough left for other people."

At night she would be awakened by one of the children crying, and having fed and quieted it, she would go to the window and remain for a long time gazing at the garden and the sky,

absorbed in silent thoughts about herself, her mother, her father-in-law and her husband, and about everything that had happened to her during the arduous day which had just gone by unnoticed. It was strange not to hear the usual voices, the songs of the work-women, now gay, now melancholy, and all the noise and stir of the factory which sounded like the humming of bees. Its ceaseless, hurrying drone of sound filled her whole day, echoes of it floating into the house, rustling among the leaves of the trees and caressing the window-panes—a continual buzz of work compelling her attention and preventing her from thinking.

But in the stillness of the night, when every living thing was hushed in sleep, she remembered Nikita's bloodcurdling stories of women who had been taken prisoner by the Tartars and the lives of the holy hermits and martyrs. She also remembered stories of people who led gay and happy lives, but as a rule memory prompted her to recall something that shocked her.

Her father-in-law used to look at her as if he were gazing into empty space, which she did not mind much, but occasionally he came face to face with her in the passage or in the room, and then he shamelessly scanned her from breast to knees with his penetrating gaze and gave an ill-natured snort.

Her husband's manner was dry and cold, and she felt that he sometimes looked at her as if she were preventing him from seeing something which was hidden behind her back. Instead of lying down when he had undressed, he often sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, with one arm resting on the eider-down, and his free hand pulling at his ear or rubbing his beard over his cheek as if he had toothache. Often too he puckered his ugly features into a frown, expressive of either melancholy or anger, and at such moments Natalya was afraid of getting into bed. He did not talk much, and then only about household affairs; and of his recollections of the lives led by peasants and landowners, things unintelligible to Natalya, he spoke less and less frequently. During the winter holidays, at Christmas time and Shrovetide, he took her for drives in the town. On these occasions the huge black stallion was harnessed to the sledge. He had yellow, copper-coloured eyes, streaked with

bloodshot veins, and kept tossing his head in an angry way and snorting loudly. Natalya was afraid of the beast, and Tikhon Vyalov made her still more frightened, by saying :

"He belonged to a nobleman, and now he is angry at having a new master."

Her mother often came to see them and Natalya envied her for the free life she led and the joyous glitter in her eyes. Her jealousy became still keener and more mortifying when she noticed the youthful way in which her father-in-law joked with her and the complacency with which he stroked his beard when he was admiring his mistress. For her part, her mother strutted about like a pea-hen, swinging her hips and shamelessly flaunting her beauty in front of him. The town, which had long known of her liaison with Artamonov, sternly condemned her behaviour and avoided her ; and respectable people whose daughters had been friends of Natalya, forbade them to go and see her, since she was the daughter of an immoral woman, the daughter-in-law of a mysterious stranger and the wife of a surly man who was swollen with pride. And so it was that the small pleasures she had enjoyed as a girl now seemed to Natalya great and resplendent.

It shocked her to see that her mother, who had formerly been so straightforward, was now sly and deceitful. She was evidently afraid of Pyotr, but to prevent him from noticing it, she flattered him and expressed her admiration of his business capacity. She must also have been afraid of Alexei's scornful eyes, because she was always joking affectionately with him and talking to him in whispers and frequently gave him presents. On his name-day she presented him with a china clock which had on it the figures of some sheep, and a woman decked out in flowers. They were all astonished at this beautiful, neatly-made thing.

"It was left me in payment of a debt of three roubles," explained her mother. "It's old-fashioned and doesn't go, but when Alexei marries it will be an ornament in his house."

"I could have used it as an ornament too," thought Natalya.

Her mother also used to make detailed inquiries into her household affairs.

"Don't put napkins on the table on week-days," she would tell her in her dull way. "They make them dirty at once with their moustaches and beards."

She now looked at Nikita, whom she had formerly liked, with tight-shut lips and spoke to him as if he were a steward suspected of dishonesty. She even warned her daughter against him :

"Take care," she said, "you don't encourage him too much. Hunchbacks are sly."

More than once Natalya wanted to complain to her mother about her husband, for not trusting her and ordering the hunchback to keep guard over her, but something always prevented her from speaking about it.

But worst of all are her mother's cross-questions about the intimacies of her married life. Uneasy like the rest at her failure to produce a boy, her mother fires off her blunt, shameless questions, her watery eyes half-closed and smiling, and a purr in her lowered voice. Her curiosity greatly excites her and Natalya is glad to hear her father-in-law's question :

"Ulyana, shall I harness the horse ? "

"I had rather walk."

"All right, I'll come with you."

"Your mother is an intelligent woman," says her husband thoughtfully. "It's clever, the way she keeps hold of father. He is more lenient towards us when she is there. I wish she'd sell her house and come and live here."

"She oughtn't to do that," is what Natalya wants so say, but she dare not and feels still more offended with her mother for being loved and happy.

As she sits with her sewing at a window which looks out on the garden, or in the garden itself, she hears fragments of a conversation between Tikhon and Nikita, who are working near the bath-house behind the shrubbery, and the *dvornik's* quiet words filter through the gentle murmur of the factory.

"It is people who produce boredom. They crowd together in a heap and then boredom begins."

"How true that is !" thinks Natalya, but Nikita's pleasant voice breaks in admonishingly :

"You are talking nonsense. What about dances and games ? If there are no people, there is no merriment."

"That's true too," agrees Natalya in surprise.

She sees that everybody round her talks with assurance and that each of them possesses a sound knowledge of some particular thing. She recognizes that firm, simple statements, in which the words exactly fit into one another, serve every one as definitions of some fragment of profound truth ; that people are distinguished from one another by what they say ; that they deck themselves out with words, rattle them like toys and play with them as if they were gold and silver watch-chains. But she has no words to play with, nothing in which she can dress up her thoughts, and so they remain clouded and elusive like an autumn mist, oppressing her with their weight and dulling her intelligence, and more and more often she thinks to herself in her misery and vexation :

"I am stupid, I don't know anything and I don't understand. . . ."

"The bear is a wizard, he knows where the honey is," mutters Tikhon among the raspberry bushes.

"That's true," thinks Natalya, and she shudders as she remembers how Alexei killed her favourite bear. Until he was thirteen months old, the bear had run about the yard, as tame and affectionate as a dog. He used to make his way into the kitchen and stand on his hind legs to beg for bread, growling softly and blinking his funny eyes. He was droll, good-natured and responsive to kindness, and everybody loved him. He became so fond of Nikita, who looked after him and combed the lumps out of his thick tangled fur and took him to bathe in the river, that when he went away anywhere, the bear would first lift his snout up and sniff the air anxiously, and then run snorting round the yard and force his way into the office, which was Nikita's room, repeatedly pressing the glass out of the window and breaking the frame open. Natalya was fond of feeding him on wheaten bread and treacle, and of his own accord he learnt to dip pieces of bread into the treacle cup. Uttering growls of delight and swaying to and fro on his shaggy legs, he would push the bread between the large teeth which filled his



pink jaws, and suck his sweet, sticky paw. Then with his good-natured little eyes beaming with happiness, he would push his head into Natalya's lap and invite her to play with him. It was even possible to talk to this engaging animal, who already understood what was said to him.

But one day Alexei gave him vodka to drink and, after dancing about and turning somersaults, the drunken bear climbed up on to the bath-house roof and began pulling the chimney to pieces and rolling the bricks down on to the ground. A crowd of workmen assembled and roared with laughter at the sight of him, and from that time Alexei began giving him drink nearly every holiday in order to amuse the men; and the bear grew so accustomed to tippling that he used to run after all the workmen who smelt of wine, and never allowed Alexei to pass through the court-yard without rushing at him. He was put on a chain, but he smashed his kennel, and with paws waving in the air and his head nodding about, he started walking round the yard with a chain on his neck and a beam on the other end of it. When they tried to catch him, he scratched Tikhon on the leg, knocked down a young workman called Morozov, and hurt Nikita, by catching hold of his hip with his paw. Then Alexei came up, took a run at him with a hunting-spear and drove it into his stomach. From the window Natalya saw the bear sink down on to his hind legs and wave his forepaws in the air as if he were begging for forgiveness from the men who were shouting angrily round him. Someone obligingly pushed a sharp carpenter's axe into Alexei's hands, and Natalya saw this brother-in-law of hers with the pointed beard, spring towards him and strike him first on one paw and then on the other. The bear roared with pain and dropped on to his shattered paws, while blood flowed from them to right and left and made red spots all over the trampled ground. He received a fresh blow on the head with a piteous growl, and then Alexei stretched his legs wide apart and drove the axe into the back of his neck, as if it had been a log of wood, making the animal thrust his snout into his own blood. The axe had penetrated so deeply into the bone that Alexei had to put his foot on the shaggy carcase before he could draw the blade out of its skull.

Natalya felt sorry for the bear, but still more sorry to know that her gay, clever and fearless coxcomb of a brother-in-law was running after a worthless woman and taking no notice of herself.

Her brothers-in-law all praised him for his adroitness and bravery and her father-in-law clapped him on the shoulder and shouted :

"And you say you are ill, do you? Ah . . . ah . . ."

But Nikita fled from the court-yard and Natalya cried so much that her husband asked her in astonishment and vexation :

"And supposing they were to kill a man in front of you, what would you do then?"

And as if she were a child he shouted at her :

"Stop it, you fool!"

She thought he wanted to strike her and restrained her tears, thinking of the first night she had spent with him, and of how tender-hearted and timid he had been then. She remembered also that he had not beaten her yet, as all husbands beat their wives, and choking back her sobs, she said :

"Forgive me. I was very sorry for him."

"You ought to be sorry for me, not for the bear," he answered in a lower and gentler tone.

The first time she complained about her husband's severity to her mother, the latter replied :

"Men are bees and we are the flowers for them. They gather honey from us. You must remember that and learn to be patient, dear. Men are masters of everything. They have greater responsibilities than we have. They build churches and factories. Look what your father-in-law has built up on a waste piece of ground."

Ilya Artamonov continued to develop and consolidate his business with frenzied haste, as if he had a foreboding that he had not long to live. In May, not long before St. Nicholas's Day, a steam boiler for a second factory-building arrived. It was brought on a barge which was moored to the sandy shore of the Oka at a point where the marshy water of the green Vataraksha flowed sluggishly into it, and there remained the

difficult task of dragging the boiler three hundred and fifty yards over sandy soil. On St. Nicholas's Day Artamonov arranged a sumptuous holiday dinner for his workmen, with vodka and beer. The tables were laid in the court-yard and decorated by the women with branches of fir and birch and bunches of early spring flowers. Indeed they looked like flowers themselves, dressed up as they were in clothes of many colours. The host sat at a table among the old weavers with his family and several guests, and made racy jokes with the saucy-tongued spool-winders. He drank a great deal and skilfully provoked people to mirth.

"*Ekh*, friends! We live well, don't we!" he kept shouting excitedly, parting his grizzly beard with his hand.

He was aware that his manners were being admired and became more intoxicated than ever out of sheer delight at being the man he was. He beamed and sparkled like the sunny spring day itself, like the earth in all her smart array of grass and leaves and June greenery, when birches and young pine trees that lift up their golden candles to the blue sky, fill the air with their scent. For spring was early and hot that year and the bird-cherry trees and lilac were already in bloom. All was festivity and jubilation, and even human beings seemed on that day to be giving out the best that was in them.

Boris Morozov, an old weaver, rose from his seat—a feeble little old man, all white and washed-out like a corpse, his waxen face snugly hidden in a greenish-grey beard. Leaning on the shoulder of his eldest son, a man of sixty, he waved a long fleshless arm in the air and shouted out in a ferocious voice:

"Look at me, I am ninety. Over ninety. What do you say to that! When I was a soldier I fought against Pugachov<sup>1</sup> and took part in a rebellion in Moscow during the year of the plague. Yes! I fought against Bonaparte. . . ."

"And whom did you make love to?" Artamonov bawled into his ear, for the weaver was deaf.

"To my two wives and others as well. Look at me! I

<sup>1</sup> Emelyan Ivanov Pugachov (1726-75) was the leader of a peasant revolt in the reign of Katherine II.

have seven sons, two daughters, nineteen grandsons and five great-grandsons. That's my bit of weaving. There they are—all of them work for you—sitting over there. . . .”

“Give us some more!” shouted Ilya.

“There will be more yet. I have outlived three tsars and a tsarina. What do you say to that! All the masters I have had are dead, and I am the only one alive! I have woven versts of linen. You are a real man, Ilya Vasilyev, and long may you live. You are a master who loves his work and whose work loves him. You don't offend people. You are a branch of our own tree, so go ahead! Success is your lawful wife, not your mistress; for a mistress spoils you and then leaves you. Go ahead for all you are worth! And God bless you, mate. God bless you, I say.”

Artamonov was so touched that he took him in his arms, lifted him up and kissed him.

“Thank you, my friend!” he cried. “I'll make you a superintendent.”

People were shouting and roaring with laughter, and the drunken old weaver, lifted high above them, waved his bony arms in the air and tittered in a shrill voice:

“He does everything in his own way, quite differently from other people.”

Ulyana Baimakova was shamelessly wiping tears of emotion from her cheeks.

“How much pleasure he is giving!” her daughter said to her.

“A man like him is created by the Lord to give pleasure,” she replied, blowing her nose.

“Learn from me how to treat people, my sons,” Artamonov shouted at his children. “Look, Pyotr!”

After dinner, when the tables were taken away, the women began singing songs and the men started making trial of their strength in wrestling and tugs-of-war, Artamonov joining in everything, and dancing and wrestling with the rest. They went on making merry until dawn, and then at the first streak of sunlight, a noisy gang of seventy drunken workmen, headed by their master, went off to the Oka, singing and whistling, as though bound on a marauding expedition, carrying on their

shoulders thick rollers, oak levers and ropes. Along the sand behind them hobbled the old weaver.

"He will get his way," he muttered to Nikita. "He will, I know it. . . ."

The blunt red monster, looking like a headless ox, was successfully unloaded from the barge on to the shore. Then they wound ropes round it, and making a united effort, with grunts and groans they drew it on rollers along the boards which had been laid on the sand. The boiler rocked as it moved forward and its stupid round jaws seemed to Nikita to be gaping with astonishment at the men's cheerfulness and strength. Though his father was drunk, he also was helping to drag the boiler along.

"Not so fast there, not so fast," he kept shouting out between his exertions.

And giving the iron monster a slap on its red side with the palm of his hand, he would add :

"Go on, boiler, go on !"

They were less than a hundred and twenty yards from the factory, when the boiler gave a lurch of more than usual violence, and slowly slipping off the front roller, buried its blunt nose in the sand. Nikita saw its round jaws blow the grey dust over his father's legs. The men swarmed angrily round its heavy carcase, in an attempt to push the roller under it, but they were already tired and the boiler remained obstinately stuck in the sand, and far from yielding to their efforts seemed to be digging itself in all the deeper. Artamonov busied about among the workmen, lever in hand, calling out from time to time :

"All together, mates ! *O—ookh !*"

The boiler unwillingly moved a little way and then once more sank down heavily, and as his father emerged from the crowd of workmen, Nikita saw that he was walking in a strange way. His face too looked strange, and as he walked along, he thrust one hand under his beard and clutched himself by the throat ; and with the other he groped his way as blind men do. The old weaver, who was hopping along behind him, kept screaming out :

"A little earth, eat a little earth!"

Nikita rushed up to his father, who hiccuped and spat blood at his feet.

"Blood!" said Artamonov dully.

His face began to turn grey, his eyes blinked with fright, his jaw quivered and the whole of his large, intelligent frame seemed to contract with fright.

"Have you hurt yourself?" inquired Nikita, seizing him by the arm. His father staggered against him and pushed him away.

"I suppose I have burst a blood-vessel," he replied in a low voice.

"Eat a little earth, I tell you . . ."

"Leave me alone! Go away!"

And once more he spat out a quantity of blood.

"I am bleeding," he muttered in bewilderment. "Where is Ulyana?"

The hunchback wanted to run home, but his father held him firmly by the shoulder and began dragging his feet along the sand with bowed head, as though he were trying to catch the sound of crunching sand, which was hardly discernible above the angry shouts of the workmen.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked as he went to the house, stepping as carefully as if he were walking along a pole over a deep river. Ulyana was standing on the steps saying good-bye to her daughter, and Nikita noticed that when she glanced at his father, her beautiful face turned round strangely like a wheel, first to the right and then to the left, and lost all its colour.

"Get some ice," she screamed as Artamonov, after putting one foot automatically in front of the other, sank down on one of the steps, hiccuping and spitting blood more frequently than ever. Nikita heard Tikhon's voice through a dream, saying:

"Ice is water, and you can't replace blood by water . . ."

"He ought to chew a little earth . . ."

"Tikhon, ride as fast as you can for the priest . . ."

"Lift him up and carry him in," commanded Alexei. Nikita lifted his father up by the elbows, but someone trod so heavily

on his toes that for a moment he was blinded. Afterwards his sight became even sharper than usual and with painful eagerness he stored in his memory all that was going on in the darkness of his father's room and in the court-yard. Tikhon was attempting to gallop out of the yard on the big black horse, but the animal was beyond his control, and instead of going through the gate, was prancing about and circling round, lifting his nose maliciously in the air and scattering people in all directions—probably frightened by the dazzling furnace which the sun had lighted in the sky. Now at last he had bounded beyond the gate and was galloping along, but when he came to the massive red boiler he shied, threw Tikhon to the ground and returned to the court-yard snorting and waving his tail.

"Run boys!" shouted someone.

On the window-sill sits Alexei, twisting his dark beard. His ill-natured face, so unlike a peasant's, tapers away to a point and looks as if it were covered with dust. He gazes unblinkingly over other people's heads at the bed where his father lies talking in a strange voice:

"This means I have made a mistake. It's God's will. Children, this is the command I give you. Ulyana is to take a mother's place among you, do you hear? Ulya, help them, for Christ's sake. *Ekh*, send the strangers out of the room."

"Don't speak," moans Ulyana in a piteous drawl, pushing little pieces of ice into his mouth. "There are no strangers here."

Artamonov swallows the ice and heaves a tremulous sigh.

"You are not judges of my sin and she is not to be blamed for it. Natalya, I have been harsh to you. Well, never mind. Now for the boys. Pyotr and Olyosha, be friends, and be a little kinder to the peasants. They are splendid, the pick of the people. Olyosha, you marry this girl you have chosen . . . it is all right."

"Father, don't leave us," implores Pyotr, sinking on his knees. But Alexei nudges him in the back and whispers:

"What are you saying? I don't believe that . . ."

Natalya cuts up ice in a copper basin with a kitchen knife, and the crunching noise made by her elbows is accompanied by

the clang of copper and the sound of her sobs. Nikita can see her tears falling on the ice. A yellowish ray of sunlight penetrates into the room, and its reflection in the looking-glass throws upon the wall a formless, quivering spot, which does its best to rub out the figures of the red Chinamen with their long moustaches, who adorn a wall-paper of the same blue as the night sky.

Nikita stands at his father's feet waiting to be remembered; and Baimakova now combs out Ilya's thick curly hair, now takes a napkin and wipes away the ceaseless stream of blood from the corner of his lip, and the drops of sweat on his forehead and temples. Then she whispers something into his glazed eyes, a burning whisper like a prayer. And he, with one hand laid on her shoulder and the other on her knee, mumbles out his last words with a tongue already leaden.

"I know. May Christ keep you. Bury me on my own land, in our cemetery, not in the town. I don't want to lie there, among those people . . ."

And then as his cup of anguish bubbled over, he whispered: "*Ekkh*, I have made a mistake, Lord . . . I have made a mistake."

A tall, stooping priest arrived with sad eyes and a beard like Christ's.

"Wait, father," said Artamonov, and once more he turned to his children.

"Children, keep together and live as friends. Business does not thrive on ill-feeling. Pyotr, you are the eldest. All the responsibility lies on you, do you hear? Go away . . ."

"Nikita," Baimakova reminded him.

"You must love Nikita. Where is he? Now go. Afterwards . . . And Natalya too. . . ."

He died of hæmorrhage in the afternoon, when the sun was still shining down in all its beneficence from the zenith. He lay with his head raised up and a frown on his waxen face, which wore an absorbed expression as if the thoughtful gaze of his parted eyelids were fixed upon the broad wrists that lay meekly crossed upon his breast.

It seemed to Nikita that his death caused more astonishment



## DECADENCE

in the household than either grief or alarm. He was conscious of this dull astonishment in everyone except Ulyana, who sat frozen to her chair beside the dead man, tearless, silent and deaf to everything, with her hands on her knees and her gaze fixed rigidly upon the stony face, set off by its snowy beard.

Pyotr on the other hand was full of importance when he entered the room where his father lay and where a fat nun was taking turns with Nikita in chanting the lamentations from the Psalter. He talked too much and his loud voice was very much out of place. First throwing an inquiring glance at his father's face, he would cross himself, stay for two or three minutes and then go cautiously out again. Afterwards his thick-set figure could be seen appearing and disappearing in the garden and the court-yard, as if he were in search of something.

Alexei was busy bustling about and making arrangements for the funeral. He kept riding into the town, coming back again and rushing into the room to ask Ulyana about the order of the funeral procession and the memorial feast.

"Wait," she would say, and Alexei would disappear, tired and streaming with sweat. Then Natalya would arrive and suggest with timid sympathy that her mother should drink some tea or have something to eat, and Ulyana would listen attentively to her and then say:

"Wait."

In his father's lifetime Nikita had not known whether he cared for him or not. He had only been afraid, though at the same time fear had not prevented him from admiring the enthusiasm for work displayed by a man who was unkind to him, and who hardly noticed whether his hunchbacked son were even alive. But now it seemed to Nikita that he was the only one with a real, deep love of his father. He was aware of being filled with vague misery, of having received a rough and pitiless shock from this strong man's sudden death. The shock and the misery he felt were so great that he even found it difficult to breathe. He sat on a chest in a corner, waiting for his turn to read the Psalter, repeating the familiar words of the Psalms to himself and looking about him. The room was

full of warm darkness in which the candles flickered like living yellow flowers. By some conjuring trick long-moustached Chinamen, carrying chests of tea on yokes, had flattened themselves against the walls. On every strip of wall-paper were eighteen Chinamen, two in a row, one row going up to the ceiling and the other going down to the floor. An oily patch of moonlight fell on one part of the wall, and there the Chinamen were livelier and walked more briskly up and down.

Suddenly above the monotonous flow of the Psalter, Nikita caught the sound of a quiet, insistent question :

"But is it possible ? Can he be dead ? O Lord !"

It was Ulyana, and the sorrow in her voice was so arresting that the nun broke off her reading and replied in a guilty tone :

"He is dead, my dear. He is dead. It's God's will. . . ."

It was more than he could bear, and Nikita got up and left the room noisily, deeply offended at the nun's behaviour.

On a seat near the court-yard gate sat Tikhon, breaking off little chips of wood from a larger one, pushing them into the sand and then driving them in deeper with his foot, so that they could not be seen. Nikita sat down beside him and looked on at his work in silence. It reminded him of that uncanny creature Antonushka, the town idiot, a shaggy, dark-complexioned youth with a crooked leg and eyes as round as a brown owl's. He used to draw circles on the sand and make cages out of twigs and chips of wood in the centres of them. But as soon as he had finished anything, he crushed it beneath his foot and rubbed sand and dust over it, singing in a nasal voice as he did so :

"Chri—st is ri—sen, He is ri—sen,  
And the cart has lost a wheel.  
*Butirma, bai, bai, buslarma,*  
*Bayu, bayu, bai."*

"What a business this is, isn't it ?" said Tikhon, smacking himself on the neck and killing a gnat. As he wiped his palm on his knee, he peeped up at the moon which had hooked itself on to a willow branch above the river, and then fixed his eyes on the flesh-coloured mass of the boiler.

"The gnats are early this year," he continued calmly.  
 "Yes, the gnats are alive, while he . . ."

Afraid of he knew not what, the hunchback did not let him finish.

"But, you see, you have killed a gnat."

He left the *dvornik* hastily and, in a few minutes, not knowing what to do with himself, appeared once more in his father's room, where he took the nun's place and began to read. He did not hear Natalya come in, as he poured out his misery in the words of the Psalms, and then suddenly he heard behind the quiet ripple of her voice. When she was near him, he always felt he might say or do something extraordinary, perhaps something terrible, and even at a moment like the present, he was afraid of saying something he did not intend. And so he bent his head down, raised his hump and lowered his breaking voice; and then, just as he was reading the words of the ninth chapter, two sobbing voices chimed in.

"Look, I have taken off his cross. I shall wear it."

"Mother dear, I am lonely too."

Once more Nikita raised his voice so as to drown what they were saying and to avoid hearing their tearful whispers, but he could not help overhearing them all the same:

"The Lord would not tolerate his sin . . ."

"I am all alone in a strange nest . . ."

"*Whither shall I go then from Thy presence and whither shall I flee then from Thy wrath?*" Nikita went on diligently chanting this lament of fear and despair, and across his memory flashed the sad saying:

"Not to love is one sorrow, but to love is two," and in a confused way he felt that Natalya's sorrow shone before him as a beacon of happiness.

In the morning Barski arrived from the town in a droshky with Yakov Zhiteikin the mayor, a vacant-eyed man who went by the name of "Underdone." He was rather round and appeared to be made literally of damp dough. They visited the dead man and paid their respects to him; and the fear and suspicion with which they each peeped into his darkened face made it clear that they also were astonished at his death.

After that Zhiteikin said to Pyotr in his sharp, sarcastic voice :

"We hear you wish to bury your father in his own cemetery, isn't it so ? This will be a slight upon us and the town, Pyotr Ilyich. It looks as if you did not want to mix with us and had not agreed to live here on friendly terms, isn't it so ?"

Alexei ground his teeth and whispered to his brother :

"Send them away."

"How is it ?" droned Barski, going up to Ulyana. "You are giving offence."

Zhiteikin went on questioning Pyotr.

"You are not doing this on the advice of Father Glyeb, are you ? No, you must change your mind. Your father was the first manufacturer in the district and the founder of a new business—a personality and an ornament to the town. Even the police captain is astonished and has been inquiring whether you are Orthodox."

He went on talking incessantly and never noticed Pyotr's attempt to interrupt him, but when the latter at last said that he was following his father's wishes, Zhiteikin quieted down at once.

"We'll come to the funeral all the same," he remarked.

And everyone saw clearly that what he had been talking about was not the real reason of his visit. He then retired into a corner of the room where Barski had pinned Ulyana against the wall and was murmuring something into her ear, but before Zhiteikin had time to reach them, Ulyana screamed out :

"You fool, go away !"

Her lips and eyebrows were quivering and she raised her head proudly as she said to Pyotr :

"These two and Pomyalov and Voroponov are asking me to persuade you brothers to sell the factory to them and they will pay me for helping them."

"Go away . . . gentlemen !" said Alexei, pointing to the door.

With smiles and little coughs, Zhiteikin led Barski towards the door, pushing him along by the elbow, while Baimakova sank down on a chest and began to cry.

"They want to wipe out his memory," she complained.

"I had rather be a villain," said Alexei with malicious solemnity, looking at Artamonov's face, "I had sooner dash my brains out than be like these people here."

"What a time to choose for making bargains!" muttered Pyotr, and he too glanced sideways at his father.

"Why don't you say something?" asked Natalya softly, going up to Nikita.

He was touched at being remembered and delighted that Natalya should be the one to think of him; and so letting his face relax into a happy smile, he said in a voice as soft as hers:

"Why should I . . . ? You and I are . . ."

But Natalya went thoughtfully away.

All the best people in the town appeared at Ilya Artamonov's funeral, and among them came the police captain, a tall, thin man with a shaven chin and grey side-whiskers. He limped along majestically by the side of Pyotr and twice repeated the same words:

"The deceased was highly recommended to me by His Highness Prince Georgi Ratski, and he entirely justified the recommendation."

"It is heavy work carrying the dead uphill!" he declared soon afterwards. And with these words he stepped out of the crowd and stood in the shade of a pine tree, his shaven lips tightly compressed, and let the crowd of townspeople and workmen go past him like soldiers on parade.

The day was bright and the sun shone down kindly, lighting up the gaily coloured crowd as it moved among vivid spots of yellow and green. It was slowly creeping up between two sandhills on its way to a third, already adorned with several dozen crosses, which stood out clearly against the blue sky and were shaded by the wide-spreading branches of a crooked old pine tree. The sand sparkled like diamonds as it was crunched underfoot, and overhead rolled the deep chanting of the priests. Last of all, stumbling and skipping along, came Antonushka, the idiot. He had no eyebrows over his round eyes, and, as he went along gazing upon the ground, he kept stooping down to pick up slender twigs from the road. These

he put in his bosom, and all the time he went on singing in his shrill voice :

“ Chri—st is ri—sen, He is ri—sen,  
And the cart has lost a wheel . . . ”

Pious people would beat him and forbid him to sing this song ; and now the police captain raised a threatening finger and called out :

“ Be quiet, you fool ! ”

Antonushka was not liked in the town, for being either a Mordvinian or a Chuvash, it was thought he could not possibly be a fanatic in the cause of Christianity. Nevertheless he was feared and considered to be a harbinger of ill fortune. At the time of the funeral feast, he appeared in the Artamonov's court-yard and went about among the banqueting tables, screaming out nonsense :

“ *Kuyatir, kuyatir*, the devil in the belfry ! *Ai, yai*, it is going to rain. It will be wet and the *Kayamas* is shedding black tears ! ” At which several perspicacious people exchanged whispers.

“ This means misfortune for the Artamonovs ! ”

Pyotr caught the whisper, and in a short time he saw that Tikhon Vyalov had pinned the idiot in a corner of the court-yard, and overheard his calm, searching questions :

“ What is a *kayamas* ? You don't know, do you ? There, be off with you ? Now then, get out ! ”

The year glided by as swiftly as a turbid stream rushes down a mountain. Nothing in particular happened, except that Ulyana Baimakova grew exceedingly grey and the sad lines of old age began to engrave themselves on her temples. A noticeable change came over Alexei. Though he became gentler and kinder, at the same time a disagreeable hastiness showed itself in his character. He spurred everybody on somehow with merry jokes and sharp words, and the rash way in which he treated the business was a source of special alarm to Pyotr. He seemed to be playing with the factory, just as he had played with the bear, which he had afterwards killed. He

had a strange passion too for the things a gentleman has about him. Besides the clock which Baimakova had given him, he had collected a number of unnecessary but rather pretty things in his room. On the wall hung a picture of girls dancing, done in bead embroidery. Yet Alexei was economical, so why did he spend money on trifles like these? He even began dressing in fashionable, expensive clothes. He shaved his cheeks and took great care of his dark, pointed beard and became less and less like a simple peasant. Pyotr felt there was something very strange and mysterious about his cousin, and without being observed, kept a suspicious watch on him—and his suspicion continued to increase.

Pyotr treated the business just as he treated people, with caution and circumspection. He proceeded at a leisurely pace and stealthily approached his work with his bear-like eyes screwed up, as if he expected it to elude him as soon as he came up to it.

Sometimes when he was tired out by business, he felt himself enveloped in a cold cloud of boredom of a particularly alarming kind. At these times the factory appeared to him like an animal made of stone, and yet alive. It lay crouching down on the ground and the shadows it cast were like wings. It lifted up a chimney like a tail and had a terrible, blunt snout. During the daytime its windows shone like teeth made of ice, but on winter evenings they turned to iron and became red-hot with rage. And it seemed as if the real, secret work of the factory was not the weaving of versts of linen, but the production of something hostile to Pyotr Artamonov's interests.

After the requiem in the cemetery on the anniversary of their father's death, the whole family assembled in Alexei's bright, pretty room.

"Father's last command was that we should live on friendly terms with one another," he said in an agitated tone. "So we must do so, though we are prisoners here."

Nikita noticed that Natalya, who was sitting next to him, shuddered and glanced in astonishment at her brother-in-law, who continued very gently:

"But still we ought not to stand in one another's way, even

though we are friends. The business is for us all, but the life of each one of us is his own. Isn't that so ? ”

“ Well ? ” asked Pyotr cautiously, looking over his brother's head.

“ You all know that I have been living with a girl called Orlova. Now I want to marry her. You remember, Nikita, she was the only one who was sorry for you, when you fell into the water ? ”

Nikita nodded. It was almost the first time he had sat so close to Natalya, and he was so happy that he did not want to move or talk or listen to what the others were saying. And when Natalya shuddered at something and gave him a gentle nudge with her elbow, he smiled and looked under the table at her knees.

“ Fate has given her to me, I am sure of it,” said Alexei. “ I can live in a different way with her somehow. But I don't want to bring her here. I'm afraid you won't get on with her.”

Ulyana Baimakova raised her troubled, downcast eyes and gave him her support.

“ I know her well,” she said. “ It is wonderful what she can do with her hands, and she can read and write too. She has supported herself and her drunkard of a father from the time she was a child. Only she is a girl of strong character and I don't suppose Natalya will get on with her.”

“ I get on with everybody,” observed Natalya in an injured tone, and her husband, with a sidelong glance at her, said to his brother :

“ This is really your own affair.”

Then Alexei turned to Baimakova and suggested that she should sell him the house.

“ What is the use of it to you ? ” he asked.

“ You ought to come and live with us,” said Pyotr, supporting him.

“ Well, I'll go and make Olga happy,” said Alexei.

When he had gone out, Pyotr gave Nikita a jog on the shoulder.

“ Why are you asleep ? ” he asked. “ What have you been thinking about ? ”



## DECADENCE

"Alexei is doing the right thing. . . ."

"Is he? We shall see. And what is your opinion, mother?"

"Of course it is a good thing he is marrying her. But who can tell how they will get on? She is a peculiar girl. A sort of madwoman."

"Thank you for such a relation," said Pyotr smilingly.

"Perhaps what I have said isn't correct?" said Ulyana, as if she were gazing into a dark place where everything was shaking about in confusion and eluding her sight.

"She is artful. Her father had a lot of things, and to prevent him selling them all to get drink she hid them in my house. Olyosha used to bring them to me at night, and afterwards I made him a present of them, as it were. So he has all her things as a dowry, and some of them are valuable. But I don't like her very much, all the same. She is too self-willed."

Pyotr stood looking out of the window with his back to his mother-in-law. Starlings were chirruping in the garden, making mock of everything in creation, and he remembered Tikhon's saying: "I don't like starlings, they are like devils." Tikhon must be a very stupid man, because his stupidity was always noticeable.

Baimakova went on talking in the same low tone and somewhat reluctantly related the story—for she was obviously occupied by other thoughts—of Olga Orlova's mother. She had been a landowner and a woman of loose character, and having become intimate with Orlov during her husband's lifetime had lived with him for five years.

"He was an artisan, and made furniture and mended clocks. He also carved figures in wood, and one of them—a naked woman—was hidden in my house. Olga considers it to be a portrait of her mother. Both of them drank. And when her husband died, they were married, but she was drowned that same year bathing when she was drunk."

"That's what happens when people love each other," said Natalya suddenly.

This irrelevant remark made Ulyana throw a reproachful glance at her daughter.

"We were talking about drunkenness, not love," observed Pyotr with a smile.

Silence fell upon them all. As he watched Natalya, Nikita saw she was upset by her mother's story. Her fingers were giving convulsive pinches to the fringe of the tablecloth and her simple, good-natured face was flushed with anger and quite unrecognizable.

After supper, when he was sitting among the lilac bushes in the garden, under Natalya's window, he caught the sound of Pyotr's thoughtful voice overhead.

"Alexei is clever. He has got brains."

And the next moment he heard Natalya's heart-rending wail.

"You have all got brains. I'm the only one who is a fool. He was speaking the truth when he said we were prisoners. It is I who am a prisoner in your house."

Nikita's heart sank with fear and pity and he clutched the seat with both hands. A force he had never known before was surging up in him, driving him he knew not where, and all the time the voice of the woman he loved grew louder and louder overhead, stirring up burning hopes in his heart.

Natalya was plaiting her pig-tail when her husband's words suddenly put a match to the fire of malice that was smouldering within her. Leaning her back against the wall, she squeezed her hands behind her, though she longed to hit something and tear it to pieces. Her words choked her, her breath came in dry sobs and she talked without paying attention either to what she was saying or to the exclamations of her astonished husband, telling him that she was a stranger in the house, that no one cared for her and that she was treated like a servant.

"You don't love me. You don't even talk to me about anything. I'm a female to you, that's all! Why don't you love me? Am I not your wife? How have I failed you, tell me? Look how mother loved your father. My heart used to be breaking with jealousy. . . ."

"Then suppose you love me like that," suggested Pyotr, as he sat in a corner of the window-sill, contemplating his wife's distorted face in the twilight. He considered what she said was stupid, yet with some surprise he felt that her grief was

legitimate, and realized it showed intelligence. But the worst part of it was that it threatened him with the danger of prolonged discord, and of fresh worries and anxieties, when he had enough of them already.

His wife's armless white figure, clad in a nightgown, quivered and swayed and threatened to sink down upon the floor. Now she whispered, now she shrieked, her voice rising and falling as if it were on a swing.

"Look how Alexei loves his . . . and he is easy to love too. He is gay and dresses like a gentleman, but what are you? You are not kind to anyone and you never laugh. I could have been perfectly happy with Alexei, but I never dared to say a word to him, because you purposely put that hunchback of yours on guard over me—the loathsome fellow. . . ."

At this Nikita got up, and with bowed head went off in despair to the bottom of the garden, parting the branches of the trees which caught him by the shoulders.

Pyotr also got up and went over to his wife, and seizing her by the hair on her crown, bent her head back and looked into her eyes.

"With Alexei?" he asked in a low, thick voice.

He was so much surprised at what she had said that he found it impossible to be angry with her or to beat her. He recognized more and more clearly that she was speaking the truth. Her existence was a boring one and he understood her boredom. Still he had to quiet her and to do this, he struck the back of her head against the wall.

"What did you say, you fool?" he inquired in a low tone.

"You would be happy with Alexei?"

"Let me go! Let me go! I shall scream. . . ."

With his other hand he took hold of her throat and squeezed it. Her face at once turned purple and her breath came in raucous gasps.

"You fool!" he said, and after pressing her against the wall, he left her. She too drew away from the wall and walked past him to the cot where the baby had been whimpering for some time. Pyotr was under the illusion that she had stepped right over him. The stars danced before his eyes and the patch of

blue sky rocked and swayed from one side to another. His wife sat by his side almost in a line with him, and without moving from his seat, he could have struck her a back-handed blow in the face. Her expression was dull and wooden, but the tears were flowing slowly and idly down her cheeks ; and as she fed her little girl, she was gazing into a corner through a glassy veil of tears, never noticing that the child was in the wrong position to suck her breast, and was whimpering, smacking its lips in the air and turning its head round.

"Let her get at your breast," said Pyotr, shaking himself as if he were waking from a nightmare. "You are not looking."

"There is a fly in the house," murmured Natalya. "A fly without any wings."

"But you know I am lonely too. There is not another Pyotr Artamonov."

He had an uneasy feeling that he had not said what he wanted to say, and that he had even said something that was not true. But to quiet his wife and avert danger from himself, he had to tell her the real facts of the case, and to make them sound very simple and incontestably clear, so that she could grasp them at once and resign herself to circumstances, and would not disturb him with stupid complaints and tears—feminine weaknesses of which she had shown no sign up to the present. He watched the careless clumsy way in which she laid her daughter in the cot, and said :

"I have a business to look after. A factory is not as simple as sowing corn or planting potatoes. It is a complex problem. And what have you got to think about ? "

At first he tried to lead up to the statement of these elusive facts by talking to her severely and giving her hints, but she kept evading him, and his voice began to sound almost piteous.

"A factory is not a simple thing," he repeated, feeling that words were failing him and that he had nothing worth while to tell his wife, who stood silently rocking the cot, with her back to him. Then Tikhon Vyalov's calm, quiet voice came to his rescue :

"Pyotr Ilyich, *ei !* "

"What do you want ? " he asked, going to the window.

"Come out here," said the *dvornik* peremptorily.

"The boor!" muttered Pyotr. "There, you see!" he added reproachfully to his wife. "I have no rest even at night, and here you are making a fuss. . . ."

Tikhon met him on the front-door steps. He was hatless and his eyes were twinkling. Glancing round the yard, which was brightly lit by moonlight, he said softly:

"I have just taken Nikita Ilyich out of a halter."

"Out of what?"

And Pyotr dropped on to one of the steps, as if he were sinking through ground.

"But don't sit down. Let us go to him. He wants you. . . ."

"What did he do it for? Eh?" Pyotr asked in a whisper, without getting up.

"He has recovered himself now. I threw some water over him. Let us go. . . ."

Raising his master by the elbow, Tikhon led him into the garden.

"He rigged it up in the ante-chamber of the bath-house. He hung a halter from a rafter in the loft, and then . . ."

"What did he do it for?" repeated Pyotr, standing rooted to the spot. "Because he missed father, or what?"

The *dvornik* stopped too.

"He had reached the stage of kissing her handkerchiefs. . . ."

"Whose handkerchiefs do you mean?"

Pyotr was feeling the ground with his bare feet and watching the *dvornik's* dog, which had appeared from the bushes and was looking at him inquiringly and wagging its tail. He was afraid of going to see his brother, for he felt he was useless and did not know what to say to him.

"*Ekh*, you have no eyes in your head," muttered the *dvornik*, but Pyotr kept silence, waiting for him to say something more.

"They were Natalya Yevseyevna's handkerchiefs. They used to be hung up here to dry after the wash."

"But why did he kiss them? . . . Stay here!"

Pyotr gave the dog a kick, under the impression that it was the short hunchbacked figure of his brother who had kissed his

wife's handkerchiefs. The whole thing was ridiculous and he spat disdainfully as he thought of it. But the next moment a burning suspicion took possession of him, and he seized the *dvornik* by the shoulders and shook him.

"Have they been kissing each other?" he asked, speaking through his clenched teeth. "Have you seen them—tell me?"

"I see everything. Natalaya Yevseyevna doesn't know anything about it."

"That's a lie!"

"What object have I in lying to you? I don't expect any reward from you."

And just as if he were hewing a hole with an axe to let daylight into a dark place, Tikhon in a few words told his master the story of his brother's unhappiness. Pyotr realized that he was speaking the truth, for the expressive glances of his brother's blue eyes, his services to Natalya and his continued solicitude on her behalf in small things, had long ago made him uneasy and brought the real state of things to his notice.

"So that's it," he whispered and added, uttering his thoughts aloud, "I was too busy to realize it."

Then he gave Tikhon a push forward and said:

"Let us go."

He did not want Nikita's glance to fall on him first, and so on entering the low doorway of the bath-house, before he could distinguish him in the darkness, he asked in a trembling voice behind Tikhon's back:

"What are you doing, Nikita?"

The hunchback did not answer. He was hardly visible on the bench by the window in the dim light which fell upon his stomach and legs. Then Pyotr made out that he was sitting with his head bent forward and his hump resting against the wall. His shirt, which had been ripped from collar to hem, was wet and clung close to the hump on his chest. His hair was wet too, and on his cheek was a dark star, with traces of its rays still remaining round it.

"Blood? Has he given himself a blow?" asked Pyotr in a whisper.

"No, I hurt him a little in my hurry," was Tikhon's stupidly loud answer, as he stepped aside.

It was dreadful going up to his brother, and as Pyotr pulled at his ear and poured out his complaints and reproaches, he listened to the sound of his own voice as if it came from someone else.

"It is shameful. A sin against God, my brother. *Ekh*, you are a disgrace! . . ."

"I know," replied Nikita hoarsely, and he also spoke in a voice that did not belong to him. "I could not bear it any longer. You must let me go. I am going into a monastery. Do you hear? And with all my heart I implore you to. . ."

He gave a whistling cough and relapsed into silence.

Pyotr was touched, and though he began once more to reproach him, he spoke gently and kindly.

"As for this affair about Natalya: that of course was a temptation of the devil. . ."

"*Oi*, Tikhon!" wailed Nikita with a growl of pain. "But I asked you, Tikhon, not to say anything. Still, don't tell her about it, for Christ's sake. She will laugh at me and be offended. Have pity on me in spite of this. And I will spend my whole life in the service of God for your sakes. Don't tell her. Never tell her. Tikhon, this is all your doing. *Ekh*, you scoundrel! . . ."

He went on muttering, holding his head unnaturally straight and still, and this was dreadful too.

"I wouldn't have said anything," said the *dvornik*, "if this hadn't happened. She won't find out anything from me."

At this Pyotr, whose heart was softening more and more, became agitated himself, and he promised faithfully on the cross that she should not know anything about it.

"There—thank you! And I'll go into a monastery."

And Nikita grew silent, as if he had gone to sleep.

"Does it hurt?" asked his brother, and receiving no answer, he repeated:

"Does your neck hurt?"

"It's nothing," said Nikita hoarsely. "You go away."

"Don't leave him," whispered Pyotr to the *dvornik*, as he went backwards towards the door past him.

But when he went out into the garden and took a deep breath of the warm, luscious scent of damp earth, his tenderness immediately vanished before the onset of disquieting thoughts; and as he paced along the path, he took care that the rubble did not grate underfoot, for he felt the need of deep quiet in which to unravel them. These assailing thoughts alarmed him by their numbers. Instead of arising in his mind, they seemed to invade it from somewhere outside, in the darkness of the night, and to flash across his brain like bats, replacing one another so rapidly that he had no time to catch them and put them into words. All he caught were intricate patterns of halts and knots which wound themselves round him and Natalya, Alexei, Nikita and Tikhon, and entangled them all together like people in the midst of some complicated dance—a dance in which everyone was whirling round too fast to be distinguished, while he stood in the centre of the circle, all alone. The words, however, in which he expressed his thoughts were very simple.

"My mother-in-law must come and live with us, and Alexei must go away. I must treat Natalya kindly, since she is the object of so much love. But surely it must have been wretchedness, not love, that made him try to hang himself. It is a good thing he is going into a monastery, because there is nothing for him to do outside. Yes, it is a good thing. Tikhon is a fool. He ought to have told me earlier."

But these were not the elusive, unexpressed thoughts which disturbed and frightened him, and forced him to peer cautiously into the thick, damp darkness of the night. The air was full of the humming of gnats, and from the little factory village in the distance floated the plaintive notes of a song like some slender stream that meanders along, faintly glistening in the darkness. Pyotr Artamonov clearly felt the necessity of stifling his fears and shaking off his anxiety as soon as possible. He did not notice that he had reached the lilac bushes under his bedroom window, and for a long time sat gazing at the black earth, with his elbows resting on his knees and his face



pressed against the palms of his hands, while the ground under his feet moved and bubbled as if it were on the point of giving way beneath his weight.

"Still, it is astonishing how Nikita overcame the difficulty of the sand," he thought. "He will go into a monastery and be a gardener there. That will be splendid for him."

He had not noticed his wife approaching, and when her white figure suddenly appeared before him as if it had risen up out of the earth, he started up in alarm. However, the sound of her familiar voice reassured him somewhat.

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake, for abusing you. . . ."

"There, that's all right. God will forgive you. I abused you too," he said magnanimously, glad that his wife had come and that he need not search for soft words with which to patch up their quarrel.

Nevertheless he had to say something consoling to her, as she sat down hesitatingly beside him.

"I realize that you are bored," he said. "Enjoyment has no place in our house. What is there to enjoy? Father saw there was enjoyment to be got out of work and it turned out he was right; for no one is merely a man. Everyone, except beggars and gentlefolk, is a workman. Everyone lives for work, but whether they live for anything beyond their work, we can't see."

He spoke cautiously, afraid of saying too much, and as he listened to his own voice, he found he was talking like a serious business man and a true employer. Yet he felt everything he was saying was somehow external to himself; that his words, instead of revealing his thoughts, were skimming over them without the power to penetrate them. He seemed to be sitting on the edge of a pit, into which someone might push him the next moment—someone who would whisper into his ear at the conclusion of his harangue:

"You aren't speaking the truth."

But just at the right moment his wife laid her head on his shoulder and whispered:

"You know you are mine for life. How is it you don't realize that?"

Putting his arm round her, he at once pressed her to his side and listened to her eager whisper.

"It is wrong not to realize it. You take a girl and she bears you children. But I might as well be without you, for all the love you give me. It is wrong, Petya. Who is nearer to you than I? And who sympathizes with you more when you are in trouble?"

It seemed as if his wife had lifted him up and turned him round in the air, so pleasantly had she weakened his decision.

"I promised him not to say anything, but I must!" he said almost with gratitude, abandoning himself to the cool refreshment of the thought.

And he hastily told her all he had heard from the *dvornik* about Nikita.

"He used to kiss your handkerchiefs, when they were drying in the garden. So you see how completely he lost his head! How was it you did not know and never noticed anything about him?"

His wife's shoulder quivered violently under his arm.

"Is she sorry for him?" thought Pyotr. But her reply was hasty and agitated.

"I never noticed his taking any sort of interest in me! *Akh*, the deceitful wretch! It is true that hunchbacks are sly."

"Does she dislike him? Or is she only pretending?" Artamonov asked himself.

"He was kind to you," he reminded her.

"Well, what if he was?" she challenged. "Tulun was kind to me too."

"And yet . . . Tulun is a dog."

"So you set him like a dog to watch me and guard me from my brother-in-law Alexei! I understand it all! *Okh*, how I loathe him! How repugnant he is to me! . . ."

Natalya was obviously offended and upset. He could tell by her throbbing skin and the convulsive movements of her fingers, as she pulled and pinched her nightgown. But to her husband her agitation seemed excessive and unreal, and accordingly he dealt her a final blow.

"Tikhon has just taken his neck out of a halter. He is lying down in the bath-house."

At this Natalya softened, and sinking down beneath his arm, screamed out in obvious terror.

"No! . . . What do you mean? O Lord! . . ."

"That means she was lying," decided Pyotr, but Natalya only jerked back her head as if she had received a blow on the forehead.

"What will become of us?" she whispered between her angry sobs. "We were only saved from a public trial by father's death, and now people will begin talking about us again. Good gracious, what have we done to deserve this? One brother tries to hang himself and another secretly marries his mistress. What does it mean? *Akh*, Nikita Ilyich! How could you behave so shamelessly? Thank you for what you have done! You have pleased us all, you heartless wretch!"

Her husband gave a faint sigh and stroked her shoulder firmly.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "Nobody will find out. Tikhon won't say anything, because he is a friend of Nikita's and is quite contented with his work here. Nikita is preparing to go into a monastery. . . ."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"*Okh*, I wish he would hurry up. How can I meet him now?"

"Go and see him," Pyotr suggested after a pause. "Take a peep at him."

But his wife sprang up as if she had been stung, and her voice was almost a scream:

"O*i*, don't send me! I won't go. I don't want to. I am afraid."

"Of what?" asked Pyotr quickly.

"Of a man who has tried to hang himself. I won't go. Do what you like! I am frightened."

"Well, let us go to bed then," he said, getting up and standing firmly on his feet. "We have endured enough for one day."

As he walked slowly along by his wife's side, he felt the

day had brought him good as well as evil. For he had discovered that he, Pyotr Artamonov, was a different kind of man from the one he had thought himself till that day. He knew now that he was wise and crafty because he had just practised a clever deception upon someone who had been troubling his peace of mind.

"Of course you are nearest to me," he told his wife. "Who could be nearer? Make up your mind that you are nearest to me and then all will be well."

At sunrise, twelve days later, Nikita Artamonov was walking stick in hand, along a dry, sandy path, darkened by heavy dew. He carried a leather bag on his hump and strode along at a rapid pace, as though he were in a hurry to escape as soon as possible from the recollection of the send-off which his relations had given him. They had all given up their night's rest to assemble in the dining-room next to the kitchen, and there they had sat primly and talked with reserve, showing clearly that not one of them had a single word of sympathy for him. Pyotr had been kind and almost cheerful, like a man who has done a good stroke of business.

"Now we have a monk in our own family to pray for us," he said twice.

Natalya was very attentive to everyone and poured out tea with unconcern, her little mouse-like ears flaming red and looking as if they had been trodden on. There was a frown on her face and she constantly left the room. Her mother was pensive and silent and occupied herself with wetting her finger in her mouth and smoothing out the grey hair on her temples. Alexei, who was usually so calm, was the only one to betray any excitement. He kept on asking questions and wriggling his shoulders about.

"When did you decide to do this, Nikita? Was it suddenly? I can't understand. . . ."

Next him sat Olga Orlova, a small girl with a sharp nose. She kept raising her dark eyebrows and unceremoniously surveying the company with eyes which Nikita did not like. They were too large for her face, too sharp for a girl, and blinked too often.

It was depressing sitting among these people, and he kept thinking timidly to himself:

"Pyotr will suddenly tell them all. I wish they would let me go sooner. . . ."

Pyotr was the first to bid him farewell. First he came up and embraced him and then said in a voice which quavered, though it was very loud:

"Well, my brother, good-bye."

He was stopped by Ulyana.

"What are you doing?" she asked. "We must sit down first and keep silence, and then pray and say good-bye."

All this was quickly done, and once more Pyotr went up to him. "Forgive us," he said. "Write about the deposit money and we will send it at once. Don't be too ascetic. Good-bye. Pray for us more."

Baimakova made the sign of the cross upon him and kissed him three times on the forehead and cheeks. Then for some reason or other she began to cry. Alexei gave him a warm embrace.

"God bless you," he said, looking into his eyes. "Each of us must follow his own path. Still, I don't understand what made you decide so suddenly."

Last of all came Natalya. But she did not come close. She made him a low bow with her hand pressed against her breast, and said softly:

"Good-bye, Nikita Ilyich. . . ."

Her breasts were still firm and girl-like though she already had three children to suckle.<sup>1</sup>

That was everybody, except Olga Orlova who thrust out a hot little hand as hard as a chip of wood. The near view of her face was still less pleasing.

"Are you really going to be a monk?" she asked stupidly.

About three dozen old weavers said good-bye to him in the court-yard, and deaf old Boris Morozov shouted out, with a shake of his head:

<sup>1</sup> Russian peasant women feed their children at the breast up to two and three years old.

"Soldiers and monks are the world's first servants. That they are!"

Nikita called in at the cemetery to take a last look at his father's grave, and, though he said no prayer, he dropped on his knees before it and mused upon the course his life had taken. When the sun rose, and a broad, angular shadow fell across the dewy turf which covered the grave—a shadow shaped like the kennel of the bad-tempered dog Tulun—he bowed down to the ground and said:

"Forgive me, father."

His voice sounded dull and hoarse in the unearthly stillness of the morning, and after a pause he repeated in a louder tone:

"Forgive me, father."

Then he began to cry bitterly and to sob like a woman, so unbearable was his sorrow at the loss of his once clear and resonant voice.

After he had gone a verst from the cemetery, he suddenly caught sight of the *dvornik*, Tikhon, standing like a watchman among the bushes near the roadside, with a spade on his shoulder and an axe at his waist.

"Are you off?" he asked.

"Yes. What are you doing here?"

"I want to dig up a mountain ash to plant near the window of my watch-house."

They stood for a moment looking at each other in silence. Then Tikhon turned his furtive eyes away.

"Go on, I'll come with you a little way," he said.

They walked on in silence, which was broken by Tikhon's remarking:

"How heavy the dews are! They are doing harm. They'll bring on drought and a bad harvest."

"God forbid!"

Tikhon Vyalov made some indistinct remark.

"What?" asked Nikita, with some alarm, for he was always waiting for Tikhon to say something that was peculiarly exasperating.

"Perhaps God will forbid it, I said."

## DECADENCE

But Nikita was convinced that the labourer had said something he did not wish to repeat.

"What is that you say?" he asked reproachfully. "Don't you believe in God's goodness?"

"Why should I?" replied Tikhon calmly. "We are in need of rain now and these dews are bad for the mushrooms. A good master would provide us with everything at the right time."

Nikita sighed and shook his head.

"It is not right to think as you do, Tikhon."

"But it is. What I think is right. I don't think with my eyes."

Once more they walked fifty steps in silence, Nikita keeping his eyes fixed on the broad shadow at his feet, and Vyalov tapping on the wooden handle of the axe in time with their steps.

"I'll come and have a peep at you, Nikita Ilyich, in a year's time, shall I?"

"Yes, do come. You are interesting."

"Yes, that is true."

He took off his cap and stood still.

"Well, in that case, good-bye, Nikita Ilyich!" And scratching his cheek he added thoughtfully:

"I am very fond of you. You are a man of meek spirit. Your father was active in body, but you are active in mind. You are spiritually minded. . . ."

Nikita threw his stick on the ground, and giving a shake to his hump so as to put his bag straight, embraced him without a word.

"I shall come then," persisted Tikhon in a loud voice, as he hugged him close.

"Thank you."

Where the road turned sharply into a pine wood, Nikita looked back. There was Tikhon, his cap thrust under his arm, leaning on his spade in the middle of the road, as if he were determined not to let anyone pass by. The morning breeze had reached him and was stirring the hair on his unprepossessing head.

## DECADENCE

From a distance he looked rather like Antonushka, the idiot. And as Nikita Artamonov hastened his steps, his thoughts fixed upon this mysterious creature, there came into his memory the tiresome tune of :

Chri—st is ri—sen, He is ri—sen,  
And the cart has lost a wheel.



## PART II

NOT till the ninth anniversary of their father's death did the Artamonovs complete the building of the church. It was then consecrated, and dedicated to Ilya (Elias) the Prophet. It had taken seven years to build, the cause of this slowness having been Alexei, who used to make jokes on the subject which were not in very good taste.

"God can wait. He is never in a hurry," he would say lightly. On two occasions he had used the bricks intended for the church for other purposes—once to add a third block to the factory, and the second time to build a hospital.

After the consecration, when the requiem mass at the graves of their father and their children was over, the Artamonovs waited until the crowd had left the cemetery, and then walked slowly home, tactfully forgetting to notice that Ulyana Baimakova had remained behind in the family enclosure, sitting on a seat under some birch trees. There was no need for hurry, because the solemn feast for the priests, friends, clerks and workmen was not until three o'clock.

It was rather a grey day and the sky was lowering, as it often is in autumn. The wet wind, breathing as raucously as a tired horse, was tossing the tops of the fir-trees, always a sign of rain; and along the red strip of sandy road swayed the dark figures of the men who were creeping towards the factory, the three blocks of which, radiating from a central point, seemed to cling to the ground with the convulsive clutch of outstretched fingers.

"Our dead father would be pleased, if he could see the work we are doing," said Alexei, waving his stick in the air.

"He would be grieved at the murder of the Tsar," replied Pyotr thoughtfully, unwilling to assent to his brother's remark.

"Well, he wasn't very fond of grieving. He lived by his own wits, not by the Tsar's."

Alexei pulled his cap farther on his head and stopped to take a look at the women. His wife, a small, slim woman dressed in a simple dark dress, was tripping along the well-trodden sand, wiping her spectacles with a handkerchief. She looked like a village schoolmistress next to stout Natalya, who wore a black silk cloak with jet beads on the shoulders and sleeves, and a dark purple bonnet which set off her magnificent red hair.

"Your wife grows more handsome every day."

Pyotr made no reply.

"Nikita has not turned up for the anniversary again. He must be angry with us or something."

These damp days made Alexei's chest and legs ache, and he was limping along, leaning on a stick. He longed to efface the mournful impression left by the requiem and to relieve the depression of this grey day. Always obstinate, he wanted to compel his brother to talk.

"Your mother-in-law has stayed behind to weep over his grave," he went on. "She still remembers him. She is a nice old woman. I whispered to Tikhon and told him to wait and see her home. She complains of asthma and says she finds it difficult to walk."

"Yes, it is difficult," repeated the eldest Artamonov, in a low, constrained voice.

"Are you asleep? What do you say is difficult?"

"I ought to get rid of Tikhon," replied Pyotr, with a side glance at the little hills, where the fir-trees stood up like angry bristles.

"What for?" asked his brother in astonishment. "He is an honest, punctual, and industrious fellow."

"And a fool!" added Pyotr.

The women came up to them and Olga spoke to her husband in a pleasant voice that sounded unexpectedly powerful for the size of her frame.

"I am trying to persuade Natasha to let Ilya go to the gymnasium, but she is nervous about it."

Natalya, big with child, was waddling along like a well-fed duck, rolling from one leg to the other. When she spoke it was with a nasal drawl, in the tone of the eldest woman there.

"In my opinion, going to the gymnasium is a mischievous habit. Look at Yelena using all sorts of words in her letters, that you can't even understand."

"Everyone must be taught!" declared Alexei severely, taking off his cap, and wiping the sweat from his forehead and the bald patch on his head. This premature baldness was slowly spreading back from his temples, making sharp indentations in his dark hair and adding considerably to the length of his face.

"What Pomyalov says is true," argued Natalya with a questioning glance at her husband. "Learning makes people unsociable."

"Yes," said Pyotr.

"There, you see!" exclaimed Natalya with satisfaction.

"Still, they must be taught," added her husband reflectively.

At this Olga and his brother began to laugh, thereby incurring a reproach from Natalya.

"What are you thinking of?" she said. "Have you forgotten that you have just come from the requiem?"

Then they took her by the arm and walked on more quickly, but Pyotr loitered behind.

"I am going to wait for mother," he told them.

He felt vexed at the disagreeable behaviour of Tikhon Vyalov. As he stood in the cemetery before the requiem, gazing at the factory in the distance, he had said aloud: "The business is growing." And in making this remark to himself, he had not been boasting, but had merely stated a simple fact about what he saw before him.

But at once he had heard the former day-labourer's calm voice behind his shoulder, saying:

"A business is like mildew in a cellar. It grows by its own force."

Pyotr had not said anything, had not even looked round,

but he was much perturbed at the obvious insult conveyed by the *dvornik's* stupid remark. Here was he working hard, providing a livelihood for more than a hundred men, thinking day and night about the business, without a thought for himself in his anxiety for its advancement, when suddenly some mystical fool came along and said that the prosperity of a business depended not on the intelligence of its owner, but on some force within itself. And this was the worthless fellow, who was always muttering something about the soul and sin.

Artamonov squatted down on an old stump of a pine tree that had been cut down, and pulling at his ear remembered how he had once complained to Olga that there was no time to think about one's soul.

He had heard her strange question :

"Does your soul exist apart from yourself?"

This had appeared to him to be merely a feminine joke, yet Olga's bird-like face had been serious and her darkish eyes had beamed affectionately at him behind her spectacles.

"I don't understand," he had said.

"And I don't understand," she had replied, "when people talk about the soul apart from a human being, as if it were an adopted orphan."

"I don't understand," Pyotr had repeated, repressing his desire to talk to her. For in spite of the fact that she was a stranger and difficult for him to understand, he liked her simplicity; though at the same time he was not proof against the fear that beneath her apparent simplicity lurked a capacity for artfulness.

But Tikhon Vyalov he had always disliked. He disliked seeing his spotty face with its prominent cheek-bones, his strange eyes, his ears hidden under his reddish hair and flattened against his skull, his thick beard, his walk which was steady without being fast, and the whole of his ungainly, thick-set figure. He also disliked and perhaps envied his calmness, and even his punctuality at his work had become irritating. Tikhon worked like a machine and hardly ever gave cause for rebuke, but even this annoyed Pyotr. And what he disliked still more was to see him becoming every year a more intimate

member of the Artamonov household, and apparently considering himself to be an indispensable spoke in the wheel of their lives. It was strange that he was loved by children and also by horses and dogs. Tulun, the old wolf-hound, who had become bad-tempered through being kept on a chain, would not let anyone, except Tikhon, come near him; and his wilful eldest son, Ilya, was more obedient to the *dvornik* than to his father and mother.

In order to get Vyalov out of his sight, Artamonov had offered him a post as church watchman and forester; but Tikhon had shaken his heavy head.

"I am no use for that. But if you are tired of me, have a rest and give me a month's leave. I'm going to see Nikita Ilyich."

Those had been his exact words—"have a rest." Stupid and impertinent as they were, linked with this reminder of his brother, who had gone beyond the marshes and hidden himself in a poor monastery among the forests, they had filled Pyotr with the alarming suspicion that Tikhon knew of some other disgrace, besides the story which he had already told him about releasing Nikita from a halter. He appeared to be waiting for fresh misfortunes and his twinkling eyes seemed to say:

"Don't touch me. You need me."

He had already been to the monastery three times. As he leisurely set out with a wallet hanging on his back and a stick in his hand, one had the impression that he was doing the earth a favour by walking upon it: in fact everything he did seemed to be done as a favour.

On his return he made curt and unintelligible replies to inquiries about Nikita, and always appeared to be keeping back something he knew.

"He is well. He is much respected. He told me to thank you for your greetings and presents."

"What does he talk about?" inquired Pyotr.

"What has a monk to talk about?"

"But he does talk about something, doesn't he?" queried Alexei impatiently.

"Yes, about God. He is interested in the weather and says that rain does not come at the right time. He complains of the gnats: there are a great number of gnats there. And he inquired after all of you."

"What did he say?"

"He is worried about you and sorry for you."

"For us? Why?"

"For every reason. Here are you living in a rush, while he is standing still, and he pities you for being so restless."

"What nonsense!" cried Alexei, roaring with laughter.

Tikhon's pupils contracted and his eyes became vacant.

"I don't know what he thinks. I am telling you what he said. I am only a simple man."

"Yes, very simple!" agreed Alexei derisively. "Like Anton the idiot."

The wind lapped Pyotr Artamonov in its warm fragrance. The sky began to clear and the sun looked out from the depths of a blue hole in the clouds. Pyotr glanced up at it, then dazzled by its brightness, plunged still deeper into reflection.

There was something mortifying in the fact that Nikita, after investing a thousand roubles in the monastery and reserving a hundred and eighty roubles a year for himself as long as he lived, had resigned his share of their father's inheritance to his brothers.

"What is the use of a present like this?" muttered Pyotr, but Alexei was delighted.

"What can he do with his money? Let those drones of monks fatten on it? No, he is quite right. We have the business and our children."

Even Natalya was touched.

"He has not forgotten the wrong he did us!" she said with satisfaction, brushing away a solitary tear from her red cheek with her finger. "This will make a dowry for Yelena."

His brother's action lay like a shadow on the mind of Pyotr, and in the town people said malicious things about Nikita's departure to a monastery and made unflattering remarks about the Artamonovs.

Pyotr got on well with Alexei, though he saw that his impudent brother only undertook the easiest part of the work—going to Nizhni-Novgorod for the fair, and paying a visit twice a year to Moscow, whence he returned full of noisy stories about the prosperity of manufacturers in the capital.

“They live in state, just like noblemen.”

“Living like a gentleman is easy,” hinted Pyotr, but his brother did not take the hint and went on in raptures.

“Merchants build enormous houses like cathedrals. And the children are educated.”

Although he had grown very grey, his youthful vivacity had returned and his hawk-like eyes sparkled gaily.

“Why are you always frowning?” he would ask his brother, and even go so far as to tell him that the way to do business was to make jokes, not to make people bored.

Pyotr noticed his resemblance to their father and yet he understood him less and less.

Alexei was still constantly reminding people that he was not strong, yet he took no care of his health, drank a great deal, gambled over cards at night, and was apparently dissolute where women were concerned. What was his chief object in life? He seemed to be a cuckoo in the nest. Baimakova's house had long been in need of thorough repairs, but Alexei paid no attention to it. His children were born weakly and died before they were five years old, the only one to survive being Miron, an unprepossessing, bony-looking boy three years older than Ilya. Both Alexei and his wife were infected with a ridiculous craving for things that were not necessary, and their rooms were chock-full of various pieces of furniture fit for the houses of gentlemen. This furniture they both liked to give away, and they presented Natalya with an amusing cupboard ornamented with china, and Ulyana with a large leather arm-chair and a magnificent bed made of speckled birch. Olga was clever at embroidering bead pictures, but her husband used to bring her back just the same embroideries from his travels round the province.

“You are an extraordinary fellow,” said Pyotr after his brother had made him a present of a massive table, ingeniously

carved and containing a quantity of drawers. But Alexei banged the table with the palm of his hand and shouted:

"Hark at him! There aren't any more pieces like that to be got. They realized that in Moscow!"

"It would have been better to have bought some silver. Noblemen have a great deal of silver."

"Give me time and we'll buy up everything. In Moscow. . . ."

According to Alexei, the population of Moscow consisted of half-witted people, who were all far less occupied in running their business than in trying to live like gentlefolk, for which purpose they bought up everything they could from the nobility, from estates to tea-cups.

Pyotr always felt with some mortification and envy, when he was on a visit to his brother, that he was more comfortable than at home; and what was also incomprehensible—he liked Olga, though why he could not understand, for she looked like a servant-girl beside Natalya. But she had no stupid fears about kerosene lamps and did not believe that kerosene oil was melted down by students from the fat of suicides. Her soft voice was pleasant to hear, and spectacles did not conceal the fact that her eyes were handsome and beaming with kindness. But of people and things she spoke with childish malice and a certain remoteness, which astonished and irritated him.

"No one has any faults in your opinion, have they?" asked Pyotr sarcastically.

"Yes they have," she replied, "but I'm not the one to judge."

Pyotr did not believe her.

She treated her husband as if she were the elder and cleverer of the two, which did not offend him in the least. He used to call her his aunt, and only on rare occasions was he ever even slightly vexed with her, and then he would say:

"Stop it, Aunt, I am tired of it. I am a sick man and there is no harm in spoiling me a little."

"You are spoiled enough already!"

She used to give her husband a smile which Pyotr would



have liked to see on the face of his own wife. Natalya was a model wife and a clever housekeeper. She was unsurpassed at salting cucumbers. She picked mushrooms and made jams. She worked in the house like a servant, with the same precision as the little wheels in the works of a clock. She was untiring in her love for her husband, giving him a devotion that was as calm and unruffled as cream. And she was also economical.

"How much money have we in the bank?" she would ask, and add anxiously: "See that it is a reliable bank and not likely to go broke!"

Whenever she carried money in her hand, her beautiful face grew stern, her raspberry-coloured lips tightened and a keen, sly expression appeared in her eyes. And in counting out the dirty, different-coloured paper notes, her plump fingers touched them cautiously, as if she were afraid of their flying away under her hands like flies.

"How do you divide your profits with Alexei?" she would inquire in bed, after sating Pyotr with her caresses. "Isn't he cheating you? He is so clever. He and his wife are both avaricious and they are grabbing everything, everything."

She felt she was surrounded by cheats.

"I don't trust anyone but Tikhon," she said.

"Which means you trust a fool," murmured Pyotr wearily.

"He may be a fool, but he has a conscience."

When Pyotr paid his first visit to the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod with her, he was struck by the vast extent of this All-Russian market.

"What do you think of it? Eh?" he asked her.

"Wonderful!" she replied. "Everything in large quantities and much cheaper than at home."

Then she began counting up the things she ought to buy.

"Eighty pounds of soap, a box of candles, a sack of sugar and lump sugar. . . ."

They went to the circus, but when the artists appeared in the arena, she shut her eyes.

"*Akh*, how shameless of them! *Akh*, they are all naked! *Oi*, is it good for me to look at them? Is it good for the

child? You oughtn't to have brought me to see such awful things, when I may be going to have a boy!"

It was in moments like these that Pyotr felt he was being choked by boredom, as surely as he would have been choked by the thick green slime on the river Vataraksha, in which no fish could live except a stupid fat tench.

Natalya also prayed at great length and with much fervour, and having finished her prayers, threw herself upon the bed, and very soon would be asleep with her eyebrows raised in surprise and a smile on her face, as if she were gazing through her closed eyes at something very splendid which she had never seen before.

It was at times like these, when Pyotr could not help perceiving with melancholy clearness that Natalya was no longer desirable, that he forced himself to remember the dreadful day on which her eldest son had been born. After painfully dragging through nineteen hours during which she had been in labour, he had been brought by his frightened and tearful mother-in-law into a room pervaded by a peculiarly stuffy smell. Writhing on the bed—her eyes starting out of her head and distorted with violent pain—was his wife, dishevelled, perspiring and unrecognizable. She received him with the moan of an animal.

"Petya, good-bye, I am dying. It will be a boy. . . . Pyotr, forgive me. . . ."

She had bitten her lips till they were swollen and now they hardly moved; and her words, instead of coming from her throat, seemed to issue from her stomach. Her face, too, was swollen and livid, and she was panting like a tired dog, with her chewed, swollen tongue hanging out of her mouth. Every now and then she seized hold of her hair and gave it a pull which tore some of it out; and all the time she went on groaning and wailing, giving one the firm conviction that she was struggling to gain the mastery over someone who would not and could not give way to her.

"A b-boy . . ."

It was a windy day and outside the window a bird-cherry tree was shaking and rustling in the breeze, casting quivering

shadows upon the panes of glass. The sight of these dancing shadows and the sound of rustling leaves drove Pyotr mad.

"Draw the curtains over the window!" he shouted. "Don't you see?"

And he fled away in terror accompanied by the screams of his wife.

But in an hour and a half his mother-in-law came to him speechless with joy and fatigue, and led him once more to his wife's bedside. This time Natalya met him with the dazzling, shining gaze of a martyr.

"A boy! A son!" she said, her tongue as weak and unwieldy as though she were drunk.

He bent down and laid his cheek against her shoulder.

"Well, mother, I shan't forget this till my dying day, I can tell you that. Thank you. . . ."

It was the first time he had ever called her Mother, and in that one word he summed up all his fear and all his delight. As she heard it, she shut her eyes and stroked his head with her weak, heavy hand.

"A splendid little fellow!" said the midwife, a large-nosed woman covered with pock-marks, showing him the baby with as much pride as if it were her own. But Pyotr did not see his son, because the dead-white face of his wife, with dark hollows where her eyes should have been, was always in the way.

"Will she die?" he asked.

"Come now!" said the pock-marked midwife in a loud, cheerful voice. "If women always died in child-bed, there wouldn't be any need of midwives."

The "splendid little fellow" was now eight years old and had grown into a tall, healthy boy with a large forehead, a snub nose, and eyes like Nikita and Alexei's mother—large, serious and of a very dark blue. Within a year of his birth, Pyotr had had another son, Yakov; but it was Ilya with his large forehead who from the age of five had been the most striking personality in the house. He was spoiled by everyone, never listened to what he was told and lived an independent life of his own, in the course of which he blundered

with astonishing frequency into dangerous and uncomfortable situations. Yet his pranks were almost always of rather an unusual nature and never failed to rouse in his father a feeling akin to pride.

One day Pyotr found him in the shed trying to fix the wheel of a barrow on to an old trough.

"What is that going to be?"

"A steamer."

"It won't float."

"I shall make it float!" said his son, in his grandfather's irritable tone.

Pyotr's attempt to convince him of the uselessness of what he was doing was a failure.

"He has got his grandfather's character," he thought to himself.

Ilya was always resolute in the pursuit of his ends: still, he could not succeed in making a steamer out of the trough and the two wheels of a barrow. Then he drew the wheels on the sides of the trough with a piece of charcoal, and after dragging it down to the river, lowered it into the water, and sank into the slime. He was not at all frightened, however, but at once called out to some women who were rinsing out linen.

"Hi, women! Pull me out or I shall drown."

His mother ordered the trough to be cut up, and gave Ilya a slapping, with the result that from that day he began to ignore her just as he ignored his two-year-old sister Tanya.

But on the whole he was a capable little fellow and was always engaged in either planing, cutting, breaking, or mending something.

"He'll turn out well," thought his father, observing this. "He'll be a builder."

Sometimes Ilya would take no notice of his father for days together. Then he would suddenly appear in his office and climb on to his knee.

"Tell me a story," he would command.

"I haven't got time."

"I haven't got time either."

Then his father would put his papers aside with a smile.

"Well then: Once upon a time there lived some peasants

...

"I know all about peasants. Tell me a funny story."

But his father did not know any funny stories.

"You go to your grandmother."

"She is sneezing to-day."

"Well, go to your mother then."

"She will wash me."

Artamonov laughed. His son was the only being who could make him laugh light-heartedly.

"Then I shall go to Tikhon," declared Ilya, trying to jump down from his father's knee, but the latter stopped him.

"What does Tikhon tell you about?"

"Everything."

"Yes, but tell me what?"

"He knows everything. He has lived at Balakhna. They build barges and boats there. . . ."

Whenever Ilya had a fall and hurt his face, his mother used to cuff him.

"Don't climb up on the roofs," she would shout. "You'll be a cripple, a hunchback."

The insult made him livid with rage, but he restrained his tears.

"I shall die if you beat me," he threatened her.

She told his father about this threat and he smiled.

"Don't beat him," he said. "Send him to me."

Ilya came and stood in the doorway with his hands behind his back.

"Why are you rude to your mother in this way?" Pyotr asked, conscious of nothing but curiosity and an agitated tenderness.

"I am not a fool," replied his son angrily.

"But you must be a fool if you are rude."

"She whips me so. Tikhon said only fools were beaten."

"Tikhon? But Tikhon himself is a . . ."

But for some reason or other Pyotr took care not to call the *dvornik* a fool; he went on pacing up and down the

room, keeping an eye on the little fellow at the door and not knowing what to say.

"But surely you beat your brother Yakov."

"He is a fool. It does not hurt him, he is so fat."

"You say he must be beaten because he is fat?"

"He is greedy."

Pyotr felt he did not know how to bring up his son, and knew the boy realized it. Perhaps it would have been simpler and better to have boxed his ears, but he could not bring himself to raise his hand over that fluffy, disquietingly engaging head. Even the thought of punishment was awkward under the steady, expectant gaze of those dear blue eyes, and the sun was also a hindrance, for it always happened to be a sunny day when Ilya played his most desperate pranks. As Pyotr administered the usual words of reproof, he thought of the time when he had listened to the same words himself, and remembered that he had neither taken them to heart nor stored them in his memory, but had only been bored by them and given a fright which had lasted all too short a time. But a beating, even when deserved, was difficult to forget; that Pyotr Artamonov knew well.

His second son, Yakov, who was round and rosy, was like his mother in face. He was always crying and even appeared to derive pleasure from it. Before his tears overflowed, he used to pant and blow his cheeks out and thrust his fists into his eyes. He was cowardly, and greedy over food, and was always either sleeping off the effects of having eaten too much or grumbling to his mother.

"*Mama*, I don't know what to do with myself!"

His daughter Yelena only came home in the summer. She was a young lady now and a stranger to her family.

At the age of seven, Ilya began to do lessons with Father Glyeb, but on discovering that the son of Nikonov the clerk was learning to read out of a book with pictures in it, called *Rodnoe Slovo*, instead of out of the Psalter, he said to his father:

"I shan't do my lessons. It hurts my tongue."

He had to be gently and lengthily questioned before he would give an explanation.

"Pasha Nikonov learns to read things he can understand, but I learn out of a strange book."

Yet high-spirited as he was, Ilya would sometimes mope alone and sit for hours by himself on a hill under a pine tree, throwing dry fir-cones into the muddy green water of the river Vataraksha.

"He is bored," thought his father. He too lived for weeks and months together amid the deafening roar of the factory, moving round and round in circles, till he suddenly lost himself in a thick fog of dark thoughts and found himself caught, like a blind man, in the toils of boredom, unable to discover whether his blindness was due to his business worries or to the fact that he was bored by their general monotony. Often on days like these he would run into people and find himself beginning to hate them for their sidelong glances and the futile things they said, and this was what almost made him hate Tikhon Vyalov on this rather dull day.

Vyalov was approaching with Ulyana on his arm.

"We Vyalovs were a large family . . ." he was telling her.

"Why don't you live with your own family then?" asked Pyotr, going up to Ulyana and taking her by the elbow. Tikhon stepped aside without saying a word, but Artamonov persisted and sternly repeated his question. Then the *dvornik* narrowed his colourless eyes and replied with unconcern:

"There aren't any of them left now. They have all been wiped out."

"What do you mean by 'wiped out'? Who has wiped them out?"

"Two of my brothers were sent off to Sebastopol and met their deaths there. The eldest took part in a rising at the time when the peasants were agitating for freedom; and because my father, who also took part in the rising, would not consent to grow potatoes when it was made compulsory to eat them, they wanted to flog him. But he ran away, and in trying to hide, fell under the ice and was drowned. Afterwards my mother had two more sons by her second husband, a fisherman called Vyalov. I was one and my brother Sergei was the other. . . ."

## DECADENCE

"And where is your brother?" asked Ulyana, blinking her tear-swollen eyes.

"He was killed."

"You talk as if you were reading out their obits at Mass," said Artamonov angrily.

"It interests Ulyana Baimakova . . . she was rather depressed, so I . . ."

Without finishing his sentence, he bent down, picked up a dry twig from the road and threw it to one side. Two minutes went by in silence.

"And who killed your brother?" asked Artamonov suddenly.

"It is man that kills," said Tikhon calmly.

"And lightning . . ." added Ulyana with a sigh.

In the middle of the summer the weather became stiflingly hot. The sultriness was pitiless and oppressive. Not a breath of air stirred in the smoky yellow sky, and fires broke out everywhere among the forests and in the pits stacked with peat. Into this calm, a hot, dry wind suddenly burst with great violence. With ferocious hissing and whistling it tore the withered leaves from the trees, and last year's red pine-needles from the firs; it piled up the sand in heaps and scattered it over the ground together with wood shavings, chickens' feathers and the refuse which had been combed out of the flax. It pushed people along, doing its best to tear their clothes off, and hid in the forests and fanned the fires to a still hotter flame.

There was a great deal of sickness in the factory. Through the hum of spindles and the rustle of shuttles, Artamonov could hear the sound of painful coughing; and at the looms he saw the men's gloomy, angry faces and watched their languid movements. Their output was diminishing and the quality of the goods was becoming noticeably inferior. Slackness had increased in a marked degree. The men were beginning to drink more and the children were falling ill. Seraphim, the carpenter, a cheerful old man with a rosy face like a child, was kept busy making little coffins, and not infrequently



he put white deal boards together to make coffins for the grown-up people who had come to the end of their life's work.

"We must arrange a feast," urged Alexei. "We must cheer people up and put fresh heart into them."

And as he and his wife were setting off for the fair, he made the same suggestion again:

"Arrange a feast and people's spirits will revive. Believe me, merrymaking is the cure for all misfortunes."

"See about it," Pyotr ordered his wife. "Provide the best of everything and do it handsomely."

Natalya began to grumble, and he asked her angrily:

"Well, what is it?"

"I hear what you say," she replied, blowing her nose loudly on the edge of her apron by way of protest.

The feast began with a service which was splendidly conducted by Father Glyeb. He had grown thinner and more dried up than ever, and as he uttered the unfamiliar words there was something piteous in the sound of his cracked voice, as if he were pouring out all his remaining strength in supplication. The grey faces of the consumptive weavers were set in a stern frown and the expressions they wore were devout and wooden. Many of the women were sobbing. And when the priest raised his sad eyes towards the misty sky, the people followed his example and gazed beseechingly up at the smoke which covered the dim, bald face of the sun, thinking perhaps that the gentle priest saw someone in the sky who knew him and was listening to his prayer.

After the service the women brought tables out into the little village street and all the workpeople sat sedately down before wooden bowls, filled to the brim with greasy soup made of vermicelli and mutton. Ten people sat round each bowl, and on each table stood from two to three gallons of strong, home-brewed beer and five pints of vodka, which soon revived the exhausted men's drooping spirits. There was a break in the silence which had lain upon the earth like a burning cap. Peace and quiet moved off over the marshes towards the forest fires, and the buzz of cheerful voices,

the tapping of wooden spoons, the laughter of children, the calls of women and the chatter of young people filled the little village.

For three hours they sat before that lavish spread. Afterwards those who were drunk were taken home and the young people gathered round Seraphim, the clean, neat carpenter, whose shirt and trousers of dark blue ticking had become pale blue through repeated washings. His tipsy pink face with its pointed nose was beaming with rapture, and in his alert little winking eyes was the sparkle of youth. There was in fact an air of heavenly joyfulness, a faint thrill of exaltation about this gay coffin-maker, which corresponded with his name. Sitting on a bench with a psaltery lying across his pointed knees, he plucked the strings with dark fingers, knotted like horseradish roots, and in an intentionally mournful and nasal voice struck up the song that the blind beggars sing :

"And here is a story to go into fits over,  
And also a riddle to puzzle your wits over!"

He winked at the girls, among whom stood the stately figure of his daughter Zinaïda, a beautiful, broad-chested, bold-eyed girl who worked as a winder. Then he began singing once more in a still higher and more mournful tone :

"The dear Christ sits in Paradise,  
And scented coolness round Him lies  
By a tall flowering lime-tree cast  
To cheer Him on His throne of bast.  
Silver and gold and gems He hands  
To all who, having wealth and lands,  
Still love to give the poor their share  
And fill the beggars with good fare."

With yet another wink at the girls, he changed the song to a dance-tune, at which his daughter put her hands behind her head in gipsy fashion and began shaking her breasts. Then to the accompaniment of the clear sound of her father's song and the twang of the strings, she uttered a piercing scream and started dancing.

## DECADENCE

“Who takes silver,  
His legs shall be lopped;  
Who takes gold,  
In flames shall be dropped;  
But he who takes a jewel  
Goes blind, the fate most cruel.”

When the whistling of the lads had been drowned by the sound of the psaltery and the merry lilt of Seraphim's song, the women and girls struck up a dance-tune:

“In from the sea the boats sail fast,  
Gifts at a fair girl's feet to cast.”

But Zinaïda went on singing in her shrill voice, stamping the ground as she did so:

“Pashka gives Palashka  
Matting for her shift—  
Teryoshka brings Matryoshka  
Birch ear-rings for his gift.”

Ilya Artamonov and Pavyel Nikonov were sitting on a pile of laths. The latter was a thin boy and, like an old man, had a bald head which kept turning restlessly round on his long neck. He had a grey unhealthy-looking face and frightened grey eyes which kept moving from side to side with a greedy expression in them. Ilya was very fond of old Seraphim, with his pale blue clothes, and liked listening to the psaltery and to the old man's funny, irascible voice. But all of a sudden this woman dressed in a fustian blouse burst upon them and began spinning round, spoiling everything with her piercing whistle and noisy, discordant song. Ilya was already completely disgusted with her, when Nikonov said in an undertone:

“Zinaïda is a dissolute woman. She lives with everyone. Even with your father. I saw him give her a squeeze with my own eyes.”

“What for?” asked Ilya carelessly.

“Well, you know that!”

Ilya lowered his eyes and felt vexed that he had asked his friend about it.

"You are lying," he said in disgust, refusing to listen to Nikonov's whisper. The latter was timid and cowardly and Ilya disliked his languid ways and the monotony of the tedious stories he told about the factory girls. Still, Nikonov knew all about hunting pigeons and Ilya loved pigeons, and also took great pleasure in defending his weakly friend against the factory children. Besides, Nikonov was clever at describing what he had seen, though he only saw what was disagreeable, and, like Ilya's little brother Yakov, never talked without making complaints about everybody.

After sitting for a few minutes in silence, Ilya went home to find guests drinking tea in the garden under the warm shade of the trees which were now grey with dust. They were seated at a large table—quiet Father Glyeb, Koptjev the mechanic, who had dark curly hair like a gipsy, and Nikonov the well-washed clerk. In fact his face had been washed so much that it was difficult to distinguish his features. He had a small nose with a moustache beneath it and a bump on his forehead, and between his nose and the bump was spread a broad smile, which hid his narrow slits of eyes beneath quivering folds of skin.

Ilya sat down beside his father, unable to believe that such a grave person could involve himself in an affair with the shameless winder, and was aware of a heavy hand upon his shoulder as his father silently stroked him. They were all limp with heat, streaming with perspiration and unwilling to talk. Koptjev was the only one whose voice rang out as clearly as if it had been a frosty winter's night.

"Shall we go to the village?" asked his mother.

"Yes. I'll go and dress," said his father, rising from the table and going towards the house. A moment later Ilya ran after him and caught him up on the steps before the door.

"What is it?" asked his father kindly.

"Did you squeeze Zinaïda or did you not?" asked Ilya, looking him in the face.

Ilya thought his father looked frightened. Not that this gave him any surprise, because he considered Artamonov a timid sort of man who was afraid of everything. That was

why he was so surly. He often felt that his father was afraid even of him, just as he was on this occasion, and in order to put heart into him, he said:

"I don't believe you did. I'm only asking you."

Pyotr pushed him into the hall and drove him along the passage into his own room. Then closing the door carefully behind him, he began pacing about the room from one corner to another, as he always did when he was angry.

"Come here," he said, standing by the table, and Artamonov junior went up to him.

"What did you say?"

"Pavlushka told me, but I don't believe it myself."

"Oh, so you don't believe it?"

Pyotr felt his anger evaporating as he stared at his son's large forehead and serious, unprepossessing face. As he pulled his ear, he considered whether it was a good or a bad thing for his son not to believe another boy's stupid chatter, for it was evident that he had not only refused to believe it but was even trying to console his father by his incredulity. He did not know what to say to Ilya and he most decidedly did not want to strike him. But he was obliged to do something and he came to the conclusion that the simplest and easiest thing was to hit him. So with some difficulty he raised a hesitating hand, buried his fingers in the boy's wiry hair and pulled it.

"Don't listen to what fools tell you!" he muttered. "Don't listen to them!"

Then he pushed him away.

"Go," he ordered, "and sit in your room! You are to remain there. Do you understand?"

Ilya went to the door. His head was bent on one side and he carried it as if it did not belong to him.

"He is not crying. I have not hurt him," was Pyotr's comforting thought as he gazed at him.

"You naughty boy!" he said, trying to be angry. "So you don't believe it? Well, this will be a lesson to you."

But this did not drown either his pity for his son or the wrong he felt he had done him or his dissatisfaction with himself.

"It is the first time I ever struck him. And I was probably thrashed a hundred times before I was ten."

But even this failed to comfort him. As he glanced out of the window at the sun, which looked like a drop of fat floating in muddy water, he heard voices calling in the village, and reluctantly went out to look at the feast.

- "Your stepson has been putting nonsense into my Ilya's head," he said in a low voice to Nikonov on the way.

"I'll thrash him for it," replied the clerk, making the offer with great readiness and apparent satisfaction.

"You must make him hold his tongue," added Pyotr with a sidelong glance at Nikonov's vacant face.

"That is simple enough," he thought to himself with relief.

The villagers greeted their master and mistress with noisy good-nature, shouting out their flattering remarks with half-drunken smiles upon their faces. Dressed in new bast shoes and white puttees tied round in Mordvinian fashion with red strings, Seraphim stamped upon the ground and spun round and round in front of the Artamonovs, singing their praises.

"Oí, who is this who comes?  
It is he himself who comes!  
And whom does he bring with him?  
It is herself he brings!"

Ivan Morozov, who had a grey beard and long hair like a priest, said in his bass voice:

"We are satisfied with you. Yes, we are satisfied."

And Mamayev, another old man, cried out enthusiastically:

"The Artamonovs look after their workpeople as gentlemen do!"

- "They are grateful people," said Nikonov to Koptjev in everyone's hearing. "They know how to appreciate their benefactors."

"*Mama*, they are pushing me," whined Yakov, who was dressed in a pink silk shirt and looked as round as a ball. His

mother was holding him by the hand and smiling proudly at the women.

"You look at the old man dancing," she said coaxingly.

The carpenter's pale blue figure was skipping about and spinning tirelessly round, while he poured forth a continual stream of quaint sayings :

"Oh stamp upon the floor, my foot !  
Stamp often and unafraid ;  
A shoe of bast before leather I put,  
And a woman before a maid !"

It was not the first time that Artamonov had heard his praises sung, and he had every reason for mistrusting their sincerity. Nevertheless he felt mollified by them.

"That's all right," he said with a smile. "Thank you. It is splendid we are all such good friends."

"What a pity," he thought, "that Ilya isn't here to see the honour that is being paid to his father."

He saw the necessity of making some generous offer in order to console his workpeople, and after a little reflection, he said, as he pulled his ear :

"I must double the size of the children's hospital."

At this Seraphim sprang away from him with his arms outstretched.

"Did you hear that ? Give a cheer for the master !"

The hurrahs which they roared out were loud, if not simultaneous, and Natalya, who was surrounded by the women, was much touched.

"Go and get three more barrels of beer," she told them in a drawling nasal voice. "Tikhon will give them out to you."

This added fresh fuel to the women's rapture, and Nikonov was deeply moved.

"A reception fit for a bishop," he said, with a shake of his head.

"*Ma-ma*, I'm so hot !" wailed Yakov.

The rejoicings were somewhat marred by the stoker Volkov, a man with a black beard and eyes as big as plums, who rushed up to Natalya with an emaciated child hanging awkwardly

from his left arm. It had fainted with heat and its skin was bluish and covered with scabs. As soon as he had reached her, he began screaming hysterically:

"What shall I do? My wife has died. Died from heat. Aow! Look what she left me! What shall I do?"

His eyes were those of a madman and yellow tears were trickling from them.

"Don't listen to him. He is out of his mind, you can see," said the women by way of excuse, as they pushed him away from Natalya. "His wife was no better than she ought to have been and a consumptive. He is not very healthy either."

"Take the child away from him at any rate," advised Artamonov irritably, and at once several pairs of women's arms were stretched out towards the limp little body. But Volkov only swore violently and ran away.

On the whole, however, everything was as bright and as gay as a holiday could make it.

"The men are increasing in numbers. If only father could see!" thought Artamonov almost with pride, as he noticed the new faces among the workmen.

Suddenly his wife said in a tone of regret:

"This isn't the moment to be punishing Ilya. He can't see how fond they are of you."

Artamonov said nothing, but glanced from under his eyebrows at Zinaïda, who was heading a group of a dozen girls and singing in a low, unpleasant voice:

"Past me dancing,  
And tenderly glancing  
At me with yearning—  
Ah, for me he is burning!"

"The hussy!" he thought. "And what a poor song!"

He pulled out his watch, looked at it, and then for some reason or other told a lie.

"I am going home," he said. "There ought to be a telegram from Alexei."

Setting off at a brisk pace, he began to consider what he ought to say to his son, and succeeded in thinking of some-



thing very severe and yet at the same time kind. But as soon as he had softly opened the door of Ilya's room, he forgot all about it. The boy was kneeling on a chair, with his elbows resting on the window-sill, and gazing out into the smoky purple sky. Twilight had filled the little room with an atmosphere like brown dust, and in a large cage which hung upon the wall a blackbird was busily cleaning his yellow beak preparatory to going to roost.

"Well, what are you doing there?"

Ilya started and looked round. Then he slowly clambered down from the chair.

"So you listen to every silly thing you hear, do you?"

Ilya was standing with his head bent down, and Pyotr realized he was doing it on purpose to remind him of the hiding he had received.

"What are you bending your head down for? Hold it straight."

Ilya raised his eyebrows, but refused to look at his father. The blackbird was beginning to hop about on his perches and to give soft little whistles.

"He is angry," thought Artamonov, seating himself on Ilya's bed and poking his finger into the pillow. "You must not listen to nonsense," he said aloud.

"How can I help it when people talk nonsense to me?"

The sound of his serious, pleasant voice delighted Pyotr, and he began to pluck up his courage and to talk in a kinder tone.

"People say silly things, but you must not listen. Forget about them. And if they tell dirty stories in front of you, forget them."

"Do you?"

"Well, of course I do. If I were to remember everything I heard, I don't know what would happen to me."

He spoke with deliberation, taking care to pick out the most simple words he could find. But he realized very clearly that what he was saying was unnecessary, and finding himself very soon becoming entangled in the dark wisdom of his simple phrases, he said with a sigh:

"Come to me."

Ilya approached cautiously, and squeezing him between his knees, Pyotr laid a gentle pressure upon the boy's broad forehead with the palm of his hand. But when he realized that Ilya would not raise his head, he became annoyed.

"Why are you so moody? Look at me!"

Ilya looked him straight in the face, but this proved still less successful because of the question which followed.

"Why did you strike me? I told you I didn't believe Pavlushka."

Artamonov senior did not answer at once. He saw with astonishment that his son by some miracle was on an equality with him. Either he had risen to the dignified level of a grown-up person or he had brought a grown-up person down to his own level.

"He is over-sensitive for his age," was Artamonov's passing thought, and getting up, he started talking hurriedly with the object of making peace with his son as soon as he could.

"I didn't hurt you. You must learn to behave. My father used to beat me much harder than that! And my mother and the groom and the steward and the German footman all used to beat me. To be thrashed by a member of your own family is not very humiliating. It is a thrashing from a stranger which gives you something to cry about. A parent's hand is light!"

As he talked, he paced up and down the room, taking six steps between the door and the window, for he was in a great hurry to end this conversation, being almost afraid that his son was going to ask another question.

"You see and hear things which you oughtn't to, when you are here," he muttered, without looking at his son, who was flattening himself against the back of the bed. "You must go to school in the town. Do you want to learn?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then . . ."

He wanted to caress his son, but something held him back; also he could not remember whether his father and mother had caressed him in the old days after they had hurt his feelings.

"Now then, go and play. And give up being friends with Pashka."

"He has no one to care for him."

"There is nothing in such a rotten boy to care for."

Artamonov withdrew into his own room and stood at the window, pondering over his lack of success with his son.

"I have spoilt him. He isn't afraid of me."

A variety of sounds reached his ears from the direction of the village—the screaming and singing of the girls, the murmur of conversation and the clash of concertinas. From the court-yard gate came the clear sound of Tikhon's voice.

"What are you doing at home, child? Do you mean to say you are at home when there is a feast? You are going away to school, are you? That's right. 'He who is untaught is unborn,' as the saying is. Well, I shall be bored without you, child."

Artamonov longed to shout out.

"That's a lie! It is I who will be bored. Ugh," he thought ill-naturedly, "the scoundrel is making up to his master's son."

After he had sent his son away to the town, where he was to be prepared for the gymnasium by Father Glyeb's brother, who was a schoolmaster, Pyotr felt that his life was indeed empty and his home wearisome. He experienced a strange, uneasy feeling as if the lamp had gone out before the ikon in his bedroom. For he was so accustomed to its little blue flame that if for some reason or other it went out, he kept waking up all through the interminable night.

Ilya's behaviour before his departure looked as if he were purposely trying to leave a bad reputation behind him. He spoke so rudely to his mother that she burst into tears, he let all Yakov's birds out of their cages, and gave the blackbird he had promised him to Nikonov.

"Why are you so naughty?" asked Pyotr, but Ilya made no reply. He merely bent his head on one side to show his father that he was teasing him and reminding him once more of what he wished to forget. It was extraordinary to realize what a large place in his heart the little fellow had.

"Could my father possibly have been as anxious about me?"

His memory, however, assured him that he had never had a close friend in his father, but only a stern master, who had paid far more attention to Alexei than to him.

"Am I kinder than my father?" Artamonov kept asking himself in bewilderment, not knowing whether he was kind or unkind. He was constantly disturbed by the thoughts which flashed through his brain at inconvenient times and occupied his mind when he was at work. The business was increasing by leaps and bounds. With its hundreds of eyes fixed upon its master, it was continually demanding his concentrated attention, but in spite of this he was always being reminded of Ilya. The threads of his thoughts about the business were continually breaking like a rotten warp and it needed a great effort to tie the loose ends together again in tight knots. He tried to fill the gap caused by Ilya's absence by paying greater attention to his younger son, but he convinced himself, much to his disappointment, that Yakov was no consolation.

"Dad, buy me a goat," demanded Yakov. He was always asking for something.

"What do you want a goat for?"

"I want to ride on it."

"What a feeble idea! Only witches ride on goats."

"But Yelenka has given me a picture-book and in it there is a good boy who rides on a goat. . . ."

"Ilya would not have believed the picture," thought his father. "He would have implored me to tell him about the witch."

Nor did he like Yakov's habit of teasing the little factory children and then complaining that they had been rude to him. His eldest son was also a bully and a fighter, but he never complained about anyone, although he was often thrashed by his friends in the village. But Yakov was cowardly and lazy and was always sucking and chewing something. Occasionally there was something quite incomprehensible and even disagreeable about his actions. For instance, after his mother

had poured out his milk at tea, the sleeve of her blouse brushed against his glass and upset it, with the result that she scalded herself with boiling milk.

"I saw you were going to spill it," said Yakov exultantly with a broad smile upon his face.

"You saw it and yet said nothing! That's not kind," remarked his father. "Now mother has scalded her feet."

But Yakov only blinked and sniffed and went on chewing without saying a word. In a few days' time his father overheard him talking to someone in the court-yard.

"I saw he wanted to hit him," he spluttered. "He came nearer and nearer till he got quite close, and then gave him one like *that* from behind!"

Artamonov looked out of the window and saw him flourishing his fists and carrying on an animated conversation with Pavlushka Nikonov. So he called him in and told him not to have anything to do with Nikonov. He wanted to give him some advice as well, but when he looked into the pale purplish whites of the boy's eyes and saw his very bright pupils, he merely sighed and sent him away.

"Go away, vacant-eyes!"

Yakov went off cautiously, as if the floor were slippery, with his elbows pressed to his sides and his hands stretched out, as though he were carrying an uncomfortable weight.

"He is clumsy and stupid," decided his father.

His daughter, a tall, reserved girl, also shared some of Yakov's tiresome characteristics. She was fond of lying down and reading books. She ate a great deal of jam at tea, and at dinner she toyed with little pieces of bread and clattered her spoon about her plate as though she were catching a fly in her soup. She was continually pressing her blood-red lips tightly together, and often said to her mother in a tone unbecoming to a young girl:

"That isn't done nowadays. It has gone out of fashion."

When her father asked her why, as an educated girl, she did not go and see how the linen for her chemises was woven, she replied:

"I should like to go."

Putting on her Sunday dress, she took the parasol which her uncle Alexei had given her and meekly followed her father, taking care to see that she did not brush against anything with her dress. She sneezed several times, and when the workmen wished her good day, she blushed, and without even a word or a smile, nodded her head—her face swollen with importance. Her father began telling her about the work, but he noticed very soon that she was looking down at her feet, not at the looms, and said no more, feeling hurt by her indifference to the stir and bustle of his business. Nevertheless as they came from the weaving-room into the court-yard, he asked her what she thought of it.

"Very dusty!" she replied, inspecting her dress.

"You haven't seen much," said Pyotr with a smile. Then he began shouting at her from sheer vexation.

"Why do you always hold up your skirt? The court-yard is clean and your skirt is so short!"

She removed the two fingers, with which she was holding up her skirt, in alarm.

"It smells strongly of oil," she said guiltily.

Those two fingers of hers irritated Artamonov more than anything.

"You'll never do much with two fingers!" he murmured.

One rainy day when she was lying down, reading on the sofa, her father sat down near her and inquired what she was reading.

"I'm reading about a doctor."

"Oh, so it is science!"

But when he glanced at the book, his anger rose.

"Why did you tell me a lie? Those are verses. Is science written in verse?"

She hastily told him some confused sort of story: God allowed Satan to tempt a certain German doctor and Satan sent a devil to the doctor. Artamonov pulled his ear and conscientiously tried to grasp the meaning of this story, but he found his daughter's superior tone mortifying and ridiculous, and it prevented him from understanding what she said.

"Was the doctor a drunkard?" he asked.

He saw that Yelena was abashed at his question, and paying no further attention to her explanations, he said angrily:

"What an intricate story! It is a fable. Doctors don't believe in devils. Where did you get the book from?"

"The mechanic gave it me."

Pyotr remembered that Yelena's grey cat-like eyes sometimes gazed pensively in front of her, and thought it necessary to warn her.

"Koptjev isn't a match for you. Don't be too free and easy with him."

Yes, Yelena and Yakov were duller and of a coarser fibre than Ilya. He saw that more and more plainly. But he did not notice that his love for his son was being gradually replaced by hatred of sickly-looking Pavyel Nikonov. Whenever he met him he thought:

"And all because of that miserable object!"

The boy was physically repulsive to him. He always walked with his back bent and his head twisting round in an alarming manner on the end of a thin neck; and even when he ran he gave Artamonov the impression that he was slinking along like a coward and a cheat. He worked hard at mending his stepfather's boots and clothes, chopping wood, carrying water, taking buckets of refuse out of the kitchen and rinsing out his brother's napkins in the river. He was dirty, ragged, and as full of bustle as a sparrow. He greeted everybody with an ingratiating smile, like a dog's grin, and whenever he saw Artamonov, even in the distance, he bowed to him and bent his goose-like neck down till his head dropped on to his chest. It was almost a pleasure to Artamonov to see him exposed to autumn rain or to watch him chopping wood in winter, or standing on one leg like a goose, trying to blow some warmth into his frozen hands, while a boot, which was worn out and full of holes, slowly slipped down the leg which he had tucked up underneath him. He also had a cough which made him clutch at his chest with blue hands and twist himself into the shape of a corkscrew.

On making the discovery that he was keeping two pairs of pigeons in the bath-house loft, Artamonov ordered Tikhon

to let the birds go, and to see that the boy did not climb up into the loft.

"He is such a feeble creature that he will fall off the roof and break his neck."

One evening he entered his office and saw him scratching the floor with a knife and wiping up a pool of ink with a wet rag.

"Who spilt it?"

"Father."

"You didn't do it yourself?"

"I swear I didn't!"

"Then why is your face covered with tear-marks?"

Pavyel did not answer. He merely remained on his knees and held his head out, ready to receive a blow.

"That is what you deserve!" said Artamonov with satisfaction, crushing him with a glance.

Then he suddenly saw the incident in its true light, and smiled into his beard as he realized how childish and ridiculous was his dislike of this worthless boy.

"What a thing to take pleasure in!" he thought condescendingly, and threw a heavy copper five-kopek piece on the floor.

"There, go and buy yourself some biscuits!"

The boy cautiously stretched out his dirty, skinny fingers towards the coin, as if he were afraid it might burn him.

"Does your stepfather beat you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of it? Everybody is beaten," said Artamonov consolingly. In a few days' time, Yakov complained that Pavyel had been rude to him, and Artamonov, who had learnt from long habit not to believe his son, advised his clerk to thrash Pavyel.

"I do thrash him," Nikonov assured him politely.

When Ilya came home for the summer holidays, dressed in strange clothes and his hair cut quite short, so that his forehead now looked larger than ever, Artamonov took a still stronger dislike to the filthy, sickly-looking Pavyel, for he saw that Ilya was obstinately continuing his friendship with him. Ilya him-



self had become tiresomely polite. He said "you" instead of "thou" in addressing his father or mother, walked about with his hands in his pockets and behaved as if he were a guest in the house, teasing his brother till he reduced him to the verge of tearful despair and exasperating his sister into throwing books at him, and altogether behaving like a scapegrace.

"I told you so," grumbled Natalya to her husband. "They always say that education makes children insolent."

Artamonov said nothing, but after keeping an anxious watch over his son, came to the conclusion that, though he was very naughty, he was playing pranks on purpose and deriving no pleasure from them himself.

Once more the pigeons appeared on the bath-house roof and were to be seen cooing and hopping about on the gable, while Ilya and Pavyel sat near the chimney, and kept up an animated chatter for hours at a time—that is, if they were not letting the pigeons fly.

"Come now, tell me the sort of life you lead," suggested his father, during the first few days after Ilya's arrival. "I have told you a lot. Now it is your turn."

Ilya gave him a brief, hurried, and not very interesting account of the way in which the boys teased their masters.

"And why do they tease them?"

"They are sick and tired of them," explained Ilya.

"Are they? That doesn't seem right. Do you find it difficult to learn?"

"No, quite easy."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Look at my marks," said Ilya, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he gazed fixedly at the sky over the garden.

"What are you looking at?" asked his father.

"A hawk."

Artamonov senior heaved a sigh.

"Well, run away and play," he said. "You find it dull with me, I can see."

As soon as he was alone, he remembered that as a child he had almost always been either bored or frightened when his father had talked to him.

"So they tease their masters! Such a thing never entered my head when the clerk of the church taught me my lessons with the aid of a leather thong. Life has become much less hard for children."

Before returning to the town, Ilya made his father a request—it was the only one he made.

"Father," he asked, "will you let Pavyel keep pigeons in the bath-house loft?"

"One can't comfort everybody who is unhappy," said his father, but he gave no promise.

"That means you'll let him," decided Ilya. "I'll tell him. He'll be delighted."

Artamonov senior was hurt at his son's showing so much concern about the pleasures of a dirty little boy, when he never took the slightest trouble to bring any happiness into the life of his own father. After Ilya's departure he felt himself the prey of a still more persistent hatred of the clerk's stepson—a hatred which had now grown so violent that, whenever anything irritated him either at home or in the factory or in the town, his thoughts were persistently invaded by the figure of this ragged, dirty little boy, as one of the chief sources of his irritation. In fact Pavyel seemed to invite him to make use of his fragile little bones as pegs on which to hang all his malicious thoughts and unkind feelings. The boy's growth was really like the growth of mould or of an evening shadow, and he kept popping up like some crafty little devil and confronting Artamonov more and more frequently.

One mild day in late summer, Artamonov went out into the garden feeling tired and irritable. It was dusk, and the tired autumn sun, shorn of its power to warm, was melting away into a greenish-coloured sky, swept clear by wind and washed by rain. A soft, sad rustle floated through the garden, in one corner of which Tikhon Vyalov was busily raking together the fallen leaves. From behind the trees came the murmur of the factory, and a lazy coil of smoke made a grey smudge upon the transparent clearness of the air. In order to avoid seeing and speaking to the *dvornik*, Artamonov went to the house

in the opposite corner of the garden. The door was not closed.

"He is there," he thought.

Taking a cautious peep into the ante-room, he caught sight of the figure of his enemy sprawling over a bench in a dark corner.

As Artamonov advanced towards him in a rage, Pavyel flung himself off the bench, and opening his mouth, uttered a low scream. Then he rolled himself into a ball and threw himself at the big man's feet. With great gusto Artamonov gave him a kick in the chest with his right foot, and stood still. There followed the sound of crunching bones, and with a faint moan the boy fell over on his side.

For a minute Artamonov thought that with that kick he had cast off a load of dirty rags of which he was heartily tired. But the next moment he looked out into the garden and listened. Then he closed the door and bent down.

"Now then, get up," he said in a low voice. "Let us go."

The boy lay on the ground with one arm flung out in front of him and the other pressed beneath his knee. One of his legs looked much shorter than the other, as though he had been trying to creep up to Pyotr without being seen, and his extended arm was dreadfully and unnaturally long. Artamonov staggered, and clutching hold of the door-post, took off his cap, and with the lining wiped away the big drops of sweat which had suddenly broken out upon his forehead.

"Get up, I won't tell anybody," he said to the boy in a whisper; but he realized already that he had killed him, for he saw a ribbon of dark blood winding away from Pavyel's cheek, as it lay pressed against the floor.

"Murdered!" was Pyotr's mental observation, but the imprudent word, brief as it was, sounded deafening in his ears. Thrusting his cap into the pocket of his coat, he crossed himself and stood gazing stupidly at the pitifully contracted little body. In his terror he could only think of a simple explanation.

"I'll say it was an accident. I hurt him with the door. Yes, the door. It's a heavy door."

He turned round and sat down heavily on a bench. There behind him stood Tikhon, broom in hand, looking at Nikonov with his watery eyes and pensively scratching his stone-like cheek.

"Look there!" began Artamonov in a loud voice, holding on to the edge of the bench with both hands, but Tikhon merely nodded.

"A puny, clumsy little boy," he interrupted. "How many times have I warned him not to climb on to the roof!"

"What?" asked Pyotr, torn between hope and dread.

"I told him he would break his neck. And you foretold it too, Pyotr Ilyich, do you remember? You must have skill if you are going to follow your own tastes. Unconscious, isn't he?"

Squatting down on his heels, the *dvornik* felt Pavyel's arm and neck, and touched his cheek with his finger, which he then proceeded to wipe on his apron by scraping it over the cloth as if he were lighting a match.

"It looks as if he were quite dead," he said. "He was a feeble little thing. It didn't take much to kill him, did it?"

Tikhon's whole manner—with his calm way of talking and slow movements—was exactly the same as usual, but his master did not trust him and was waiting for him to threaten and to condemn him. However, after looking up at the square hole in the ceiling and listening to the cooing of the pigeons, Tikhon began talking once more in the same calm and simple way.

"He used to climb up by the door. He would put one leg on the bench and the other on the door-handle, and then get on the top of it. From there he would catch hold of the edge of the hole and begin drawing himself up by the arms. But there was no strength in his little hands, and so he fell down and, as you can see, struck his head on a corner of the door."

"I didn't see it happen," said Pyotr, whom a sense of self-preservation prompted to make a rapid reply.

"Is he lying? Is he deceiving me? Is he setting a trap

so as to get me into his power? Or has the fool failed to guess the truth?"

The last was most probable. Tikhon was behaving stupidly, and his head was swaying backwards and forwards as if he had struck someone with his forehead.

"*Ekh*, these specks of dirt! Why do they exist?" he sighed. "I'll go and tell his mother. I don't suppose his stepfather will grieve for him very much. The boy was only a burden to him."

Artamonov listened with great suspicion to the *dvornik's* talk and tried to catch a false note in it, but Tikhon spoke, as he always did, in the tone of a man to whom curiosity is unknown.

"Hush!" he said, as he listened with raised eyebrows to a woman who was calling angrily somewhere in the court-yard.

"Pashka! Pashka—a . . ."

Tikhon stroked his cheek.

"Here is your Pashka for you! Get your tears ready. . . ."

"No, he is a fool!" decided Artamonov, and pulling his cap out of his pocket, he carefully examined its broken peak, and went into the garden.

For the next two or three weeks he felt a tide of vague fear ebbing and flowing within him, and threatening him every day with some fresh calamity, some unknown disaster. Now was the moment when the door would open, and Tikhon would come in and say:

"Of course I know everything . . ."

But outwardly all went well. Obedient to the law of birth and burial, everyone accepted the boy's death as a simple fact. Nikonov tied a new black tie round his yellow neck, and his well-washed face assumed an air of modest importance, as if he had received a reward that had long been due to him. The dead boy's mother, a tall, thin woman with a face like a horse, was in a hurry for the funeral—so Artamonov thought—but she said nothing and shed no tears. She occupied herself with arranging the muslin frill round the head of the coffin, changing the position of the prayer-band on the dead boy's forehead, and pressing down with cautious fingers the

bright new kopeks which closed his eyes. And from time to time she crossed herself with absurd haste. Pyotr noticed at the requiem that her arm was so tired that she was twice unable to lift it up. As soon as she raised it, it dropped again as if it were broken.

Yes, as far as the boy's family were concerned, everything had gone smoothly. The Nikonovs had even wearied him by the volubility of their thanks for helping them with the funeral, though he had only given a little, for fear of rousing Tikhon's suspicions by being too generous. He still could not believe that the *dvornik* was as stupid as he had appeared to be in the bath-house. To him it was strange and uncanny that for the second time the bath-house should be the means of enhancing the *dvornik's* importance, and of intruding him still further into the intimacies of his life. He even thought of setting the place on fire, or pulling it down and sawing it up for firewood—it was already old and rotten—and of building another bath-house elsewhere.

Yet after keeping a watchful eye on Tikhon, he saw that he was going about his work with his usual show of reluctance as if he were conferring an unwilling favour. He was just as taciturn as ever, as rude to the workpeople as a policeman, and heartily disliked by them. Women in particular he treated with rudeness and disdain, the only exception being Natalya, whom he addressed as if she were a relation—an aunt or an elder sister—and not his mistress.

"Why are you so very kind to Tikhon?" Pyotr asked her more than once.

"He has become one of the family," she replied.

If Tikhon had had any friends or had gone about at all, one might have imagined him to be a member of some non-orthodox sect, for of late years many different sects had sprung up. But he had no friends except Seraphim the carpenter, and liked going to church and saying earnest prayers, during which, for some reason or other, he always opened his mouth in an ugly way, as if he were going to scream. Sometimes when Artamonov glanced at his twinkling eyes, he frowned, under the impression that a threat lurked in their watery

orbs, and he longed to seize him by the collar and shake him and say :

"Now, will you speak !"

But the twinkle would fade away from Tikhon's pupils and the stony calm of his face, with its massive cheek-bones, would quell Pyotr's anxiety. When Anton the idiot was alive, he had often sat in the *dvornik's* watch-house, or spent the evening sitting beside him on a bench near the court-yard gate, while Tikhon plied him with questions :

"Don't talk nonsense. You must think and explain yourself. Who is *Kuyatir* ?"

"*Kayamas* !" Anton would scream delightedly and begin to sing :

"Chri—st is ri—sen. He is ri—sen . . ."

"Stop !"

"And the cart has lost a wheel . . ."

"What are you trying to get out of him ?" Artamonov would ask with a solicitude which he did not understand.

"I want him to explain the superhuman words he uses."

"But they are only the words of an idiot !"

"Even an idiot must have some sort of reason," Tikhon would say stupidly.

On the whole it was not worth while talking to him. As he lay awake one stormy night, Artamonov felt he could endure this dead weight upon his mind no longer, and waking up his wife he told her what had happened to the Nikonov boy. Natalya blinked sleepily and heard him out in silence.

"I forget my dreams," she said with a yawn.

Then she gave a sudden start and made an inconsequent remark about her younger son.

Artamonov in astonishment pulled his ear and thought with annoyance :

"Why did I tell her ?"

That night amid the roar and whistle of the snowstorm, he thought, with a deepened consciousness of his own loneliness, of something which threw light upon the murder and explained it. In killing a dangerous friend to Ilya, he had been actuated

by the strength of his love for his son, and by fear of his undoing. This provided a reasonable motive for the obscure hatred which he had had for the Nikonov boy and gave him a certain amount of relief. But he longed to be entirely free from this load of guilt and to throw it upon someone else's shoulders. He therefore asked Father Glyeb to come and see him, since he did not wish to tell him about this unusual sin at confession, when he did penance for ordinary sins.

The thin, stooping priest arrived in the evening and sat down quietly in a corner. He always thrust his long frame deep into corners where there was the least light and the least room, as if he were hiding away in shame. His figure, clad in an old dark cassock, was hardly distinguishable from the dark leather of the arm-chair he sat in, the only thing to stand dimly out against this gloomy background being his face. Little drops of melted snow glistened like glassy dust on the hair round his temples, and as usual he held his long, scanty beard squeezed in his bony fist.

Hesitating to open the conversation with what weighed upon his mind, Artamonov began telling the priest how quickly people became corrupted, and expressed his anger at their laziness, drunkenness, and immorality. Finding this subject dull, however, he relapsed into silence and proceeded to pace up and down the room. Then from his dark corner the priest poured forth an oration which was very like a lament.

"No one takes any interest in the spiritual welfare of the people, and they are not accustomed to take any interest in it themselves. They don't know how to. Still, there are some educated people—I don't want to criticize them because there aren't many among us—but they don't even try to lead the ordinary life of the people, you know. They wish to do a great deal, but not the chief thing, and this leads them to raise insurrections, for which they are persecuted by the authorities. On the whole the wheels of our machinery do not run smoothly somehow. Amid this futile hubbub a single voice is to be heard appealing more loudly every day to the conscience of the world, and striving by every means in its power to stir it up. That is the voice of a certain Count Tolstoi, a philosopher and a



man of letters. He is a most remarkable man, and the things he says are daring to the point of insolence, but there again, you see, the Orthodox Church is involved. . . .”

The priest talked about Lyeв Tolstoi for a long time, and although Artamonov could not understand all of it, the sound of his sighing voice issuing from the gloom like a quiet stream, and the almost fabulous figure which the priest drew of this extraordinary man, took him out of himself. Though he had not forgotten the reason for which he had asked the priest to come, he gradually succumbed to a feeling of pity for him. He knew that the poor in the town looked upon him as a saint because he was not avaricious, because he treated everyone with kindness, conducted the services in church well, and had a particularly moving way of taking funeral services. Artamonov considered that all this was natural—that was what a priest should be. What evoked his sympathy was the general dislike in which Glyeb was held by the clergy and the better-class people in the town. Nevertheless a spiritual pastor was bound to be stern. It was his duty to administer sharp rebukes and to rouse people to a dread and a loathing of sin. This was a power which Artamonov knew Glyeb did not possess, and as he listened to his unconvincing way of talking and heard him hesitating to express an opinion, obviously from fear of giving offence, he said suddenly:

“I brought you here to-day, Father Glyeb, to inform you that I am not going to Holy Communion this year.”

“How is that?” asked the priest thoughtfully, and then, without waiting for a reply, said: “You will have to answer for it to your own conscience.”

Artamonov thought he detected the same insincerity in these words as he did in Tikhon’s. The priest was too poor to wear galoshes, and he sat splashing the soles of his heavy peasant boots in the puddles formed by the melted snow which had trickled from them, while he continued to talk in a tone plaintive, but devoid of criticism.

“If you look at the present state of things, you will see only this one gleam of comfort: as evil increases in the world, it unites its forces as if to make the victory over it easier. I

have always observed that when evil first appears it is like a little peg upon which more and more evil afterwards accumulates like thread on a spindle. When the forces of evil are dispersed they are difficult to overcome, but once they are united, they can be cut off with one stroke of the sword of justice. . . ."

His words remained in Artamonov's memory and gave him a certain degree of comfort. Pavycl, to be sure, had been the peg, round which all his dark thoughts had formerly gathered. It was he who had attracted them. Once more he thought he could justly assign a share in his sin to his son, and with a sigh of relief he invited the priest to stay for tea.

The dining-room was bright and comfortable, and its warm air was filled with savoury smells. The samovar was boiling on the table and giving out inviting puffs of steam, and Ulyana was sitting in an arm-chair, singing a song in her pleasant voice to her four-year-old granddaughter:

"By holy Heaven  
These gifts are given:  
To the Apostle Peter,  
The sun, the summer-heater;  
To good Saint Nicholas,  
Freedom by sea to pass;  
And to Elias the Seer,  
A sharp and golden spear."

"A pagan song," said the priest with an apologetic smile, as he sat down at the table.

Natalya was talking to Pyotr in their bedroom.

"Alcxei has returned. I have seen him. He is raving more than ever about Moscow. *Okh*, I am afraid that . . ."

That summer some little red spots had appeared on Natalya's white neck and polished, rosy-cheeked face. Though they were no bigger than pinpricks, they worried her, and twice a week, before going to sleep, she assiduously rubbed some honey-coloured ointment into her cheeks. It was this which occupied her as she sat in front of a looking-glass, with her elbows moving up and down and her globe-like breasts shaking

heavily beneath her chemise. As Pyotr lay in bed with his arms thrown behind his head and his beard pointing at the ceiling, he glanced at her sideways and found she looked like some sort of machine. He noticed too that her ointment smelt of boiled sturgeon. Having said her prayers in an earnest whisper, she lay down in bed, but he pretended to be asleep.

"The peg," he thought, "and I am the spindle. I am whirling round. But who is spinning? Tikhon said that man spun, but that the devil wove the sackcloth. What an uncouth fellow he is!"

Developed by Alexei, the business gradually covered more and more of the sandhills above the river. These had lost their golden hue, the silver glitter of mica had disappeared and splinters of quartz flashed no longer. The sand had been trodden down and every spring the vegetation upon it grew thicker. Weeds took on a brighter green, plantains impressed their leaves upon the paths, and burdocks spread out their great ears. The trees in the factory garden scattered their pollen, and in the autumn manured and enriched the sandy soil with rotting leaves. The mutter of the factory grew louder and louder, as it breathed out its fears and troubles. Hundreds of spindles hummed, looms whispered, machines panted and gasped all day long, and over everything floated the ceaseless drone of industry and labour. It was good to know one was master of all this, in fact more than good. It filled one with astonishment and pride.

But at intervals, which became more and more frequent, Artamonov was overwhelmed with weariness, and his thoughts would go back to the years of his childhood, to the country, the clean, quiet river Rat, the spacious distances and the simple life of the peasants. At times like these he felt himself whirling round in the clutch of invisible hands. All day long his head was filled with a roar of sound which left no room for thoughts of anything but his business, and the curling smoke of the factory chimney drew a veil of despondency and boredom over all his surroundings.

During the hours or days that this mood lasted, he felt a

particular dislike for his workpeople, who seemed to him to be growing steadily feebler, and losing their peasant-like capacity for endurance. They appeared to be infected by a feminine irritability which made them excessively touchy, insolent and quarrelsome, and they were also inclined to be feckless and unreliable. In his father's time they had lived much more in families and had been on better terms with one another. They had not been so drunken nor so shamelessly dissolute. But nowadays everything was in confusion. The workpeople were more vivacious and perhaps even more intelligent, but on the other hand they were more malicious towards one another, more careless over their work, and more inclined to keep a suspicious watch upon one another for fear of being swindled. The younger generation of workers were particularly impudent and disrespectful, and the factory was rapidly making them entirely unlike peasants.

Volkov the stoker had to be sent to the lunatic asylum in the town. It was only five years since he and his gay wife had presented themselves at the factory, he being then a handsome, healthy man, who had lost all his possessions in a fire. In a year's time his wife had become unfaithful, and he had begun beating her, which had brought on consumption, and now both of them were gone. Many similar instances of swift destruction had come under Artamonov's notice. In five years there had been four murders, two of which had been committed in a brawl, another from motives of revenge, and an old weaver, who had stabbed a winder in a fit of jealousy, had committed the fourth. Besides these murders, brawls, which continued till blood was drawn and serious wounds inflicted, were frequent.

All this had apparently no effect upon Alexei, who was becoming more incomprehensible than ever. He had something in common with Seraphim, the clean, jovial carpenter, who made whistles and cross-bows for children with as much joy and dexterity as he made their coffins. Alexei's hawk-like eyes sparkled with the assurance that everything was going well and would continue to do so in the future. He already had three graves in the cemetery, the only one of his

children with a firm and tenacious hold on life being Miron, whose long bones and sinews had been put together so hastily and clumsily that he creaked and cracked all over. The boy had a habit of twisting his fingers and making them crack loudly, and at thirteen already wore spectacles, which made his long, bird-like nose a little shorter, and cast a shadow over his unpleasantly bright eyes. He always went about book in hand, keeping his finger jammed between the pages, so that the book had the appearance of having grown on to him. He talked to his father and mother as an equal, or rather he did not talk—he discoursed. They liked it, but Pyotr did not, and feeling sure his nephew disliked him paid him back in his own coin.

The atmosphere of Alexei's house was frivolous and jaunty, and the elder Artamonov saw that the difference between his own life and his brother's was almost as great as the difference between a monastery and a booth at a fair. Alexei and his wife had no friends in the town, yet on holidays their rooms, which were as cram-full of useless old things as a lumber-room, became the resort of people of such dubious character as Yakovlyev the factory doctor, a sarcastic, bad-tempered man, who had gold teeth; Koptjev the mechanical engineer, who was a noisy fellow as well as being a drunkard and a gambler; Miron's tutor, a student who had been forbidden to remain at the university by the police; and his snub-nosed wife, who smoked cigarettes and played the guitar. Besides these were a few outcasts from society, who all abused priests and the authorities in the same insolent way, and thought themselves exceedingly clever. Artamonov was thoroughly convinced that they were not the right kind of people, and could not understand what attraction they had for a man like his brother, who owned half of a large and important business. As he listened to their clamour he remembered the complaint the priest had made:

"They wish to do a great deal, but not the chief thing."

He never asked himself what the chief thing was, because he knew it was business.

His brother's favourite was obviously Koptjev, the noisy

gipsy. Though he looked as if he were drunk, there was a suggestion of obstinate persistence, and even intelligence, about him, and he talked more than anybody else.

"That's all nonsense, mere philosophy! Manufacture and technical knowledge—these are the things we want!"

But Artamonov senior suspected him of heretical and subversive tendencies.

"A dangerous young man!" he told his brother. Alexei was astonished.

"Koptjev? What do you mean? He is a splendid fellow, capable, clever, and as strong as an ox! I wish we had a thousand others like him! If I had a daughter," he added with a smile, "I should marry her to him so as to bind him with chains to the business."

Pyotr went away in a surly mood. If they were not playing cards, he sat by himself in an arm-chair which he liked because it was as wide and soft as a bed. As he looked at the people and pulled his ear, he felt he could not agree with a single one of them, and longed to argue with them all. He wanted to argue with them not only because they all ignored him, though he was senior partner in the business, but also on other grounds which were not clear to him. Being a poor talker, he rarely put in a word, and then only with an effort:

"But look here, Father Glyeb has been telling me about a count . . ."

"What have you—you—got to do with a count?" Koptjev promptly barked back at him. "That count stands for rural Russia at its last gasp!"

He was shouting this out and pointing his finger disrespectfully in Pyotr's direction. As they listened, all the rest grew like him, and became wandering, homeless gipsies too.

"Moths," thought Pyotr, "and idlers!"

"It is incorrectly said that business is not a bear, because it won't go off to the forest," he remarked on one occasion. "But business is a bear, the reason why it doesn't go off to the forest being that it already holds man in its bear-like hug. Business is man's master."

"There, you see!" barked Koptjev. "Where would a

thing like that be said? Who would say it? That is the danger of people like you!"

And his brother Alexei inquired sarcastically:

"What is the matter with you? Do you borrow your ideas from Tikhon?"

This made Pyotr very angry.

"Look after Yelena," he said to his wife when he reached home. "That gipsy Koptjev is hovering round her. Alexei spoils him. But Yelena is too choice a morsel for a man like him. You must find a husband for her."

"What sort of husbands are there for her here?" began Natalya anxiously. "We must look for husbands in the town. Besides, it is early yet. . . ."

"Not too early for her to get into trouble," Artamonov remarked with a smile, thereby evoking a playful little laugh from his wife.

Whenever he succeeded in escaping from his responsibilities for a short time and breaking out of the narrow circle of his worries about the factory, he felt himself enveloped once more in a thick fog of hatred towards others and dissatisfaction with himself. There was only one bright spot in his life, and that was his love for his son, but even this was clouded by the shadow of the Nikonov boy and buried deep under a load of murder. When he looked at Ilya, he sometimes felt an urgent need to say to him:

"This is what I have done out of my fears for you."

He was not astute enough to disguise the fact that his fear had only arisen a second before the murder, though he realized it was the only thing which could give his act even a semblance of justification. Nevertheless when he talked to Ilya he was afraid of even mentioning his friend's name, for fear he might accidentally give himself away over a crime which he wished to regard as an heroic exploit.

He saw that his son was rapidly growing up, but was living in a world of his own. Ilya was becoming quieter. He spoke more gently to his mother and no longer teased Yakov, who was also at the gymnasium. He liked to go about with his younger sister Tatyana and would laugh not unkindly at

Yelena, yet in everything he said a certain thoughtful and preoccupied reserve was noticeable. Pavyel Nikonov's place had been taken by Miron, and the cousins chattered together unceasingly and waved their arms about, and were hardly ever apart. Together they did their lessons and together they read and sat in the garden or the summer-house. Ilya was hardly ever at home, for after appearing at breakfast in the morning he either went off to his uncle in the town or accompanied Miron and Goritsvyetov to the forest. The latter was a sly, dark-complexioned, impetuous little boy, covered with prickles like a burdock. He had a shuffling walk, and a cast in his eye, which gave him a quizzical expression and made him look as if he had a squint.

"You have a passion for being friends with Sheeneys like that," Natalya remarked disdainfully to Ilya. Pyotr saw Ilya's finely pencilled brows give a quiver.

"'Sheeney' is an insulting word, mother. You know that Alexander is the nephew of our priest Glyeb, which means he is Russian. At the gymnasium he is top. . . ."

Natalya gave a snort of contempt.

"Sheeneys always climb to the top."

"How do you know that?" persisted Ilya. "There are four Jews in the town and they are all poor, except the apothecary."

"Yes, and there are forty little Sheeneys. There are Sheeneys everywhere in Vorgorod, even at the fair. . . ."

"'Sheeney' isn't a nice word," repeated Ilya with rude persistence.

Then his mother flushed and tapped her saucer with her teaspoon.

"Don't talk to me like that!" she screamed. "I know the way to speak, don't I? I'm not blind. I can see the way he makes up to everyone. He even curries favour with Tikhon. What I say is that he is as kind-hearted as a Sheeney, and kind-hearted people are dangerous. I knew a kind-hearted man once. . . ."

"That's enough!" interrupted Pyotr sternly.

"What's the matter, Pyotr Ilyich?" she wailed, on the verge of tears. "I can't say a word."



Ilya frowned and said no more.

"After all I am your mother," Natalya reminded him.

"Thank you," said Ilya, pushing away his empty cup.

Casting a sidelong glance at him, Pyotr smiled and pulled his ear, for he could hear by the way Natalya spoke that she was afraid of Ilya, just as she had formerly been afraid of kerosene lamps, and quite recently of an ingenious coffee-maker which Olga had given her, and which she imagined would burst. Even Pyotr felt something akin to Natalya's ridiculous fear of Ilya. He was an incomprehensible youth, in fact all three of the children were incomprehensible. Otherwise what amusement could they find in the society of Tikhon the *dvornik*? Every evening they sat with him near the court-yard gate, and Artamonov could hear the peasant's admonishing voice:

"That's it. The less you carry, the more lightly you go. But don't believe in angles. There aren't any angles in the sky, are there? There are no walls in the sky."

The schoolboys roared with laughter. Ilya had a little velvet laugh and Miron a dry, sarcastic one. Goritsvyetov, on the other hand, laughed much less heartily than they did, and always broke off abruptly to assure his friends that what they were laughing at was not in the least funny.

The lazy murmur of Tikhon's mysterious talk made itself heard once more:

"You must learn more about man, children, as a human being. Learn what each man is destined for, what his fate is to be. There, that is something for you to conjure with! Words, too, you must understand thoroughly. You often all talk in turns, but of course you are arguing in a vicious circle. There is no end to anything."

And Tikhon repeated the saying which Pyotr knew so well:

"Man spins the thread and the devil weaves the sackcloth, and so it goes on, and will go on for ever."

The young people roared with laughter and Tikhon joined in too with his deep laugh.

"*Ekh*, you educated boys!" He sighed. "How green you are!"

In the twilight the children looked smaller and more insignificant than they had done in the sunlight, but Tikhon seemed to swell and expand, and to say even stupider things than he did in the daytime.

Ilya's conversations with Tikhon only strengthened Artamonov's dislike of the *dvornik*, besides inspiring him with vague apprehension.

"What does he do to amuse you?" he would ask Ilya.

"He is an interesting man."

"What makes him interesting? His stupidity?"

"Even stupidity needs to be understood," replied Ilya quietly.

Artamonov was pleased at his answer.

"That's true," he said. "We are all stupid."

But at once the thought occurred to him:

"Those are Tikhon's words!"

He felt particularly hopeful about Ilya. Whenever he saw him whistling softly at the window with his hands in his pockets, or gazing at the workmen in the court-yard, or strolling about the weaving-room, or walking light-footed into the village, Artamonov thought with satisfaction:

"He will make a keen-sighted master. He will be more willing to go into the business than I was. He has only to be harnessed, and he will pull."

He was a little hurt, however, that the boy was so untalkative; for even if Ilya spoke at all, he was brief, and appeared to have thought out what he meant to say beforehand, which did not encourage one to continue the conversation.

"He is rather cold-blooded," thought Artamonov, but he comforted himself by considering how fortunate it was that he was not like that noisy chatterbox Goritsvyetov, nor like Yakov with his languid, lazy ways, nor like Miron. The last was rapidly losing his youthful manner and beginning to talk bookishly, and becoming arrogant. In fact he resembled a civil servant, who knows that for every situation which can occur there exists some rigid legal precedent.

The weeks of the holidays had passed like lightning, and now the children were on the eve of departure. As it happened,

Natalya gave her parting words of advice to Yakov, and Pyotr talked to Ilya, but he did not say what he wanted to say. For how could he tell him that life was dull when monotonous worries about business enveloped one like a cloud of gnats! One did not talk to little boys about things like that.

Artamonov had such an ardent longing to experience something out of the ordinary, something unavoidable like snow, rain, mud, heat or dust, that at last he found, or rather contrived, his opportunity.

While travelling in an obscure and wooded corner of the District,<sup>1</sup> he was overtaken by a June thunderstorm, accompanied by hail, deafening peals of thunder and blue flashes of lightning. Along the narrow forest road, no longer distinguishable in the darkness, there poured a stream of water which made the ground under the horses' feet a slough and covered the wheels of the coach up to the axles. It was an eerie sight to see the liquid bubbling earth lighted up for a second by a cold blue flame, and through a glassy network of rain to catch a glimpse of black trees by the roadside rising up out of the wet darkness and bobbing up and down in terror. The horses, which were no longer visible, had come to a standstill and were snorting and stamping their hoofs in the water, while Yakim, the fat, gentle coachman, timidly tried to quiet them. Hail was falling fast, filling the forest with its hiss. Then it turned to heavy rain, which lashed the foliage with millions of drops like small shot, and filled the darkness with an angry moan.

"We must go to the Popovs," said Yakim.

And presently, afraid to move in the borrowed clothes he had got into with difficulty, Artamonov found himself sitting shyly at a table in the pleasant half-light of a warm, dry room, as if he were in a dream. A nickel-plated samovar was singing, and a tall, thin woman, dressed in a loosely cut dark dress, with her reddish hair piled up like a turban, was pouring out tea. Her grey eyes shone brightly out of her pale face and in a soft voice she was telling him quite simply and humbly, without any complaining, of the recent death of her husband,

<sup>1</sup> A sub-division of a Russian "Government" or Province.

and of her wish to sell her property and move into the town, where she could open a preparatory gymnasium.

"This is your brother's suggestion. He is an interesting man, so full of life and originality."

Pyotr, who was surveying his surroundings, gave a grunt of envy. As a young man he had often paid visits to gentlemen's houses when travelling about the "Government" with his father, but had never noticed anything particular about them, and had only been aware of feeling shy both of people and things. But nothing in this house made him shy, for it seemed to radiate something good and kind. A big lamp under a dull shade shed a milky light upon the cups and saucers and silver which lay on the table, and on the dark, smooth-brushed hair of a little girl who was wearing a green shade. Before her lay an exercise-book in which she was drawing with a fine pencil, and as she drew she hummed softly to herself, without however disturbing the flow of her mother's talk. The room, which was not very large, was crowded with furniture, all of which seemed to have grown into it, though each piece had a separate existence of its own and told its own story. Such were three bright pictures on the walls, of which the one opposite Pyotr represented a fabulous white horse with its neck proudly arched and a mane so incredibly long that it almost reached the ground. Everything was astonishingly comfortable and peaceful, and his hostess's beautiful voice sounded like the distant strains of some pensive song. In such surroundings as these a man could spend his whole life free from care and wrong-doing, and if this woman were his wife, he could respect her and discuss everything with her.

Through a semicircle of coloured panes of glass in the balcony door, blue flashes of lightning were still to be seen illuminating the black sky, but they were no longer terrifying.

When Artamonov went off at daybreak, he carried with him "a treasured impression of the peace and comfort which had welcomed him, and an almost unearthly picture of the quiet grey-eyed woman who had given him the welcome. As the coach splashed its way through pools of water which reflected,

with equal clearness, the golden sun and the dirty patches made by scudding clouds, he thought with sadness and envy :

"What a wonderful life to lead !"

For some reason or other he did not tell his wife about his new acquaintance, nor did he say anything to Alexei, which made it all the more awkward for him when he arrived at his brother's house a few weeks later and found Vera Popova sitting next to Olga on the sofa. Alexei pushed him towards her.

"This is my brother, Vera Nikolayevna."

Popova stretched out her hand with a smile.

"We have met already."

"Is that so ?" exclaimed Alexei in astonishment. "When was it ? Why didn't you tell me ?"

Pyotr felt there was a shade of unpleasantness in Alexei's astonishment, and thought he saw a mysterious movement of his beard.

"I forgot," he replied as he pulled his ear.

"Look, he is blushing !" shouted Alexei, impudently pointing his finger at him. "No, that was not a clever answer of yours, my boy ! Do you mean to say it is possible to forget this lady, once one has seen her ? Look, his ears are burning !"

Popova gave him a smile of gentle indulgence.

They were drinking iced honey-beer out of tall cut-glass goblets. It had been brought by Popova as a present for Olga and was the colour of amber and tingled pleasantly on one's tongue. It prompted Pyotr with some very happy remarks, but it was useless trying to get them in, because of Alexei's tiresome and unceasing chatter.

"No, Vera Nikolayevna, don't you be in a hurry to sell ! That property must be sold to someone who loves peace and quiet. It is a place for rest. What can people in our class give you ? You have no land and not much forest, and what you have of that is poor. Besides, who wants forest here, except hares !"

"You mustn't sell," said Pyotr.

"Why not ?" asked Vera, thoughtfully sipping her honey-beer, and added with a sigh, "I must."

Pyotr did not like Olga's look of intentness, nor the quiver

of her lips as she tried to hide a smile, and he gloomily finished his beer without making any reply to Vera Popova.

Two days later Alexei informed him in the office that he intended to give Popova a sum of money in return for a mortgage on her personal belongings.

"Her property is worth seven roubles, but her effects . . ."

"Don't do it," said Pyotr very decidedly.

"Why not? I know what things are worth."

"Don't do it."

"But why not?" shouted Alexei. "I shall take an expert valuer there!"

Pyotr shook his head. He longed to dissuade his brother from his enterprise, but could not find any objections to it.

"Let us go halves," he suggested suddenly. "You give one half and I give the other."

Alexei smiled and stared at him.

"Are you beginning to play the fool?"

"It seems as if the time had come," said Pyotr Artamonov in a loud voice.

"It is no good looking in that direction!" his brother informed him. "I have tried, and she is as cold as a fish."

After meeting Popova two or three times, Artamonov began to dream about her. As soon as he set her at his side, life rose up before him as a wonderful vision of external ease, comfort and beauty, and of inward quietness and charm—a quietness not to be disturbed by the daily sight of dozens of people who were neglecting their work. For the workpeople were always discontented. Either they screamed and complained, or they lied and tried to deceive him; and their importunate flattery irritated him just as much as their ill-concealed and ever-increasing hostility. It was an easy matter to create a picture of life beyond the pale of all this turmoil and remote from the factory, which, like a large red spider, was continually spinning and enlarging its web. He saw himself as something like a large tom-cat who wanted nothing else but warmth and quiet and a mistress to love him and be ready to stroke him.

Just as the Nikonov boy had formerly been the dark spot in his life, round which had gathered all that was depressing and

disagreeable, so now Popova became the magnet which attracted to itself nothing but good thoughts and kind intentions. When Alexei and some sly old man in spectacles went to Popova's estate to value her personal property, he refused to accompany them, but when Alexei returned, after having settled the terms of the mortgage, he proposed that he should sell the mortgage to him.

This came as an unpleasant surprise to Alexei, and for a long time he tried to find out what his brother's object was.

"Listen," he said at last. "I am not getting any profit out of this! She hasn't the money to pay off the mortgage, and her things are worth a great deal, you understand? So I want more than I gave her."

The bargain was struck, and Alexei said with a frown:

"I wish you luck. You have done me a good turn."

Pyotr also felt he had done himself a good turn in providing himself with a quiet corner to rest in.

"I am not to tell your wife, I suppose?" Alexei asked with a wink.

"That's your affair."

"Olga thinks you have fallen in love with Popova," he went on, giving Pyotr a searching look.

"That's my affair."

"Don't growl. At our time of life nearly every man has a love affair."

"Leave me alone!" replied Pyotr rudely and angrily.

He soon became aware that although Olga's tone in talking to him was more affable than ever it contained a shade of compassion, and this he disliked.

"Has your husband been telling you some yarn about Popova?" he asked, as he sat with her one autumn evening.

"It won't go any farther than me," she said, stroking his hairy hand lightly.

"It won't go anywhere," said Artamonov, thumping his knee with his fist. "It will stay with me. It is a thing you can't understand. Don't say anything to her."

He experienced a longing for Popova. In his dreams she appeared before him, not as the woman he desired, but as the

necessary complement of a good and just life and a comfortable home. But when she moved into the town and he began seeing her more often at Alexei's house, he suddenly felt dazed by her. Olga happened to fall ill, and he caught sight of Popova, with the sleeves of her blouse tucked up, leaning over a basin at her bedside, and alternately bending and unbending as she soaked a towel in water. Her astonishing slimness was irresistibly alluring.

With an effort he bowed his head in answer to her greeting, and going over to the window, sat down to recover his breath.

"Are you ill, Olga?" he inquired crossly. "That's not right."

It was the first time that a woman had such a powerful and devastating effect upon him, and it frightened him, because he felt vaguely that there was something dangerous and menacing about it. Accordingly, as soon as he had sent his coachman to fetch the doctor, he set off along the road to the factory on foot.

It was the end of February and a thaw had set in, the signal of an impending snowstorm. A grey mist hung over the ground, hiding the sky from sight and confining Artamonov's horizon to a bowl inverted over him. From this bowl there poured a slow stream of cold grey dust, which settled so thickly upon his moustache and beard that it almost prevented him from breathing. As he strode over the powdery snow, he felt even more depressed and dejected than he had done on the night of Nikita's attempted suicide and at the time of the murder of Pavyel Nikonov. For it was clear to him that on both these occasions he had been in a similar state of depression, a fact which made this third occasion seem all the more dangerous. And it was also clear that he would never be able to make this lady his mistress. Already he saw that his sudden and ardent attachment for her was obscuring and breaking down something which he prized in himself. Already it was consigning her to the ranks of the commonplace. He knew too well what a wife was like, and he had no grounds for thinking that a mistress would be in any way better.

"What is it you want?" he kept asking himself. "Do you want to go astray when you have a wife?"



## DECADENCE

Whenever any danger threatened him, he always felt an ardent longing to stride through it as quickly as possible and, having left it behind him, to refuse to look back. To stand in the face of impending danger was like standing on some dark night in spring upon a crumbling block of ice as it floated on a deep river—a terrifying experience which he had been through as a lad and which he would never forget as long as he lived.

After a few days spent in a state of oppressive and suffocating stupefaction, he rose early in the morning after a sleepless night and went out into the court-yard to find Tulun, the dog which was kept on a chain, lying in the snow in a pool of blood. It was still so dark that the blood looked pitch-black. When he moved the shaggy body with his foot, Tulun moved too, and baring his teeth, glanced at the foot out of a protruding eye. Artamonov shuddered and opened the low door of the *dvornik's* watch-house.

"Who killed the dog?" he asked, standing on the threshold.

"I did," said Tikhon, holding a saucer of tea on his five extended finger-tips.

"Why did you do it?"

"He bit someone again."

"Who was it?"

"Seraphim's daughter, Zinaïda."

Pyotr grew pensive. After a pause, he said:

"I am sorry for the dog."

"Of course you are! I reared him. But he was beginning to growl even at me. I suppose even a man would go mad, if he were put on a chain."

"That's true," said Artamonov, and went away, after shutting the door very carefully behind him.

"Even that fellow talks sense at times," he thought.

He stood in the middle of the court-yard listening to the droning murmur of the factory. In the far corner a gleam of yellow light came from the window of Seraphim's lodgings, which were built on to the stable wall. Artamonov went up to it and looking in at the window saw Zinaïda, with nothing on but a chemise, sitting at a table in front of a lamp and cobbling

up something with a needle. She did not raise her head when he entered the room, but merely asked :

“ Why have you come back ? ”

Then she raised her eyes, and throwing her sewing on the table, got up with a smile.

“ *Oi*, good gracious ! ” she exclaimed. “ I thought it was father.”

“ Listen ! Was it you who were bitten by Tulun ? ”

“ Yes, I should think I was ! ” she said almost boastfully, and putting her leg up on a chair, she lifted the hem of her chemise : “ Look there ! ”

Artamonov cast a casual glance at her white leg, which was bandaged below the knee, and went close up to her.

“ And why do you run about the court-yard at dawn ? ” he asked in a thick voice. “ Why is it ? ”

She looked inquiringly into his face and at once gave him a knowing smile. Then blowing violently down the lamp-glass she put out the light.

“ We must lock the door,” she said.

Half an hour later Pyotr Artamonov was wending his way slowly towards the factory, pulling his ear as he went. From time to time he spat as he recalled with astonishment the winder’s lack of shame, or smiled at the thought of having practised a clever deception upon someone.

He had burst into the dissolute life of the factory girls like a bear into a bee-hive, and had found that it surpassed all that he had heard about it. At first he had been struck by its aggressive coarseness of speech and feeling. Everything about it was dissipated and provocative of the shameless behaviour which was the subject of their songs both grave and gay. Zinaïda and her friends called it love, and there was certainly something pungent and bitter about it, something far more intoxicating than wine.

Artamonov knew that Seraphim’s cottage, which stood against the stable wall, was called “ The Trap ” by the employees in the factory. The carpenter’s own name for his house, however, was “ The Monastery.” As he sat on a bench near the stove, with an embroidered towel invariably flung over his

## DECADENCE

shoulder and a psalter lying upon it, he would toss his curly head gaily and a smile would play over his rosy face.

"Now then, nuns, make merry!" he would call out with a wink. "These are the nuns, Pyotr Ilyich. What do you think of them? They are employed in the service of the gay devil and I am their superior, a kind of priest, a bag of rattling bones. Throw down your rouble and take your pleasure!"

As soon as he had received the money, he would push it inside his leggings and sing a rousing song which he would accompany on the psaltery:

"The lofty lady, though in hell,  
Imperiously rings her bell  
For roasted ice! Her pride to cool,  
The demons prick and toast the fool!"

"You know a lot of quaint sayings," Artamonov would remark in surprise.

"A sieve! I am like a sieve!" the little old man would boast jokingly. "You can pour whatever rubbish you like into me and I'll sift you out a song. That's the sort of fellow I am—a sieve!"

He would also tell stories.

"That was told me by some gentlemen," he would say. "The Kutuzovs were very remarkable gentlemen, and so was Mr. Yapushkin, who was also a drunkard. He pretended to be poor—sly fellow that he was—and went about on foot with a pack on his shoulders, as if he were a pedlar, but really he was making notes of everything he saw and heard. He wrote and wrote, and then he went to the Tsar: 'Look, Your Majesty,' he says, 'this is what our peasants are thinking about!' The Tsar looked, dipped into the notes, and being much perturbed by them, ordered that the peasants should be given their freedom, and that a large bronze memorial should be put up to Yapushkin in Moscow. Yapushkin was not to be touched himself, but to be transported alive to Suzdal and given as much wine as he wanted at the Government's expense. Because, you see, he was still secretly making notes about the people, only as they were of no advantage to the Tsar they had

to be hidden. Away in Suzdal he drank himself to death, and of course his notes were stolen."

"You are a bit of a liar!" remarked Artamonov.

"I have never lied to anyone except girls. It is not my trade," said the old man. It was always difficult to tell when he was not joking.

"To lie, a man must know the truth," he went on jocosely, "and I can't lie because I don't know the truth. If you want to know why that is, I'll tell you: I have seen a great deal of truth and my couplet is this: Truth like womanhood, when young and fair, is good."

But although he did not know the truth, he knew an endless number of stories about gentlefolk, about their amusements and misfortunes, their harshness and wealth. And in telling stories of this kind he always added, with evident regret:

"Now, however, they have come to an end. They have come down from the heights and can't even understand themselves! They have fallen. . . ."

As he said this, he would draw a circle above his head with his finger, and then dropping his arm quickly, describe the same circle on the floor.

"They have played too many pranks," he would say with a wink, and begin to sing:

"Some rollicking roysterers,  
Growing too boisterous,  
Ate up whole artichokes—  
On which the whole party chokes!"

Seraphim would tell stories about robbers and witches, peasant risings, fatal loves and fiery serpents which flew to disconsolate widows at night, all of which he would describe in such an engaging manner that even his irrepressible daughter listened in silence with the thoughtful eagerness of a child.

Artamonov observed with dislike that Zinaïda combined abandoned dissoluteness with calculating business acumen. More than once he remembered the way she had slandered Pavyl Nikonov—slander which had proved to be only too true a prophecy.

"Why did I pick her out?" he kept asking himself. "There are others more beautiful than she is. I shall be in a fix when my son finds out about her."

He also noticed that Zinaïda and her friends treated their amusements as unavoidable obligations, just as soldiers treated the army, and thought sometimes that they deceived themselves as much as others by their shamelessness. He soon became repelled by Zinaïda's tiresome greed for money and her continual requests for it—a trait which was much more pronounced in her character than in Seraphim's, who spent his money on a sweet wine called "Teneriffe"—he called it turnip-wine for some reason or other—and also on marmalade, buns, and his favourite sausage flavoured with garlic.

Artamonov was very fond of this light-hearted, amusing old man and skilful artisan, and he knew that everyone else liked him too. At the factory he was called "The Comforter," and Pyotr saw that there was more truth than derision in the nickname, and that what derision there was had an affectionate ring in it.

Seraphim's friendship with Tikhon, therefore, was all the more incomprehensible and distasteful to him, especially as Tikhon seemed to be doing his best to deepen his dislike. It was now twenty years since Vyalov had entered the service of the Artamonovs, and Natalya determined to celebrate his name-day as a solemn occasion.

"Think what a rare fellow he is!" she said to her husband. "For twenty years we have not seen anything to find fault with him for. He burns like a wax candle."

Wishing to pay him a special honour, Pyotr brought the *dvornik* his presents himself. Seraphim, smartly dressed, met him in the watch-house, and behind him stood Tikhon, looking down with bent head at his master's boots.

"A watch from me, there you are! Some cloth for a coat from my wife, and some money as well."

"Money I don't need," muttered Tikhon. Then he said "Thank you," and invited his master to drink a glass of "Teneriffe" which Seraphim had given him.

The latter at once began allegorizing:

"You know our worth, Pyotr Ilyich, and we know yours. We realize that a bear likes honey and that a blacksmith hammers iron. Gentlemen have been bears as far as we are concerned, but you are a blacksmith. We see your work is heavy and arduous."

At this point Vyalov, who was looking at his silver watch and turning it round in his fingers, said:

"Work is a railing for man. We are walking along the edge of a pit and holding on to it like a railing."

"That's it!" cried Seraphim with delight. "It's true! Otherwise we should fall."

"Now you are talking nonsense!" said Artamonov. "It is because you are not masters. You can't understand. . . ."

Although Tikhon's words had at once roused his anger, he could not express himself strongly enough. It was not the first time that Tikhon had clothed his obscure and stubborn ideas in words, and Artamonov found them becoming more and more irritating. As he looked at the *dvornik's* stone-like head plentifully besmeared with oil, he sniffed, and pulling his ear, searched his brain for a crushing retort.

"Of course there are different kinds of work," began Seraphim conciliatingly. "Some are bad and some are good. . . ."

"A knife may be good, but you can't stand it against your throat!" muttered Tikhon.

Artamonov longed to abuse him roundly and hardly able to control his longing, asked sternly:

"What is this nonsense you are always muttering about work? It is impossible to understand."

"Yes, it is difficult to understand," agreed Tikhon, looking under the table.

"He is only saying that work should be harmless, Pyotr Ilyich," began the carpenter once more.

"Stop, Seraphim, let him speak for himself."

Tikhon remained in the same position, displaying to his master a bald grey patch on the crown of his head, the size of the palm of one's hand.

"It was the Devil who taught Cain to work," he said with a sigh.

"That is going a long way back!" shouted Scraphim, slapping himself on the knee with his hand.

Artamonov rose from his chair.

"You had better not talk about what you don't understand," he warned the *dvornik* angrily.

Much perturbed, he left the watch-house and began reflecting over the fact that he must get rid of Tikhon. To-morrow he would get rid of him. Well, not to-morrow perhaps, but in a week's time. In the office Vera Popova was waiting for him. She greeted him coldly like a stranger, and seating herself on a chair, struck the floor with her umbrella and began telling him that she could not pay all the interest on the mortgage at once.

"That doesn't matter," said Pyotr quietly, without looking at her.

"If you won't consent to let me defer payment," he heard her continue, "you have the right of foreclosing on me."

She said this in an offended tone, then striking the floor once more with her umbrella, disappeared so suddenly and quickly that he did not catch a glimpse of her until she was closing the door behind her.

"She is angry," pondered Artamonov. "I wonder why?"

In an hour's time he was with Olga, flapping his cap against her sofa.

"You tell her," he said, "that I don't want the interest. I don't want any money from her. How much is it, after all? Tell her not to worry herself; do you understand?"

Olga was picking out skeins of different coloured silks and moving a little box of beads about the table.

"I understand," she said thoughtfully, "but she hardly will."

"You must make her understand; I don't care if you do or not!"

"Thank you," said Olga, twinkling through her spectacles.

Her glassy smile irritated Pyotr, and he said rather rudely:

"Don't laugh! That's not what I am looking for. So don't think it is."

"*Okh*, you boor!" said Olga with a sigh, shaking her smoothly brushed head doubtfully.

"Believe me," shouted Pyotr, "I know what I am saying."

"*Okh*, do you really?"

The tone in which she said "*okh*" was sympathetic. Artamonov could hear that, and he could see that she was looking at him through her spectacles with pity, almost with tenderness, but it only made him angry. He wanted to speak to her with convincing lucidity, but being unable to find the words he wanted, he remained gazing at the window-sill, where exquisite bunches of begonias hung among fleshy leaves which looked like the ears of an animal.

"I am sorry about her property. It is a remarkable one. She was born there. . . ."

"She was born in Ryazan."

"She has grown accustomed to living there, which comes to the same thing. It was there that my soul was first lulled to sleep."

"Woke up," corrected Olga.

"It is all the same for your soul whether it falls asleep or wakes up. . . ."

He went on talking for a long time, although what he said was obscure even to himself. Olga listened with her elbows leaning on the table, and when he had exhausted himself, she said:

"Now listen to me."

And she proceeded to inform him that Natalya knew about his affair with the winder, adding that she was hurt and tearful, and was complaining against him. But it left Artamonov unmoved.

"The artful creature!" he said with a smile. "She never gave me the slightest hint that she knew. Has she been complaining to you? Yes, I see she has. And yet she doesn't like you."

"I remember I once told you," Olga sighed, "that your soul was an adopted child, and it is, Pyotr. You fear yourself as you would fear an enemy."

This vexed him.

"The way you talk to me is impertinent. Am I a little boy? You ought to consider that when I talk to you, I am



laying bare my soul, and that I have no one else to talk to in this way. You can't carry on a conversation with Natalya. There are times when I long to beat her. But you . . . *Ekh*, you women ! ”

He put on his cap and suddenly finding himself speechless with boredom, went away, thinking of his wife—for he had not thought of her for a long time now. In fact he hardly ever noticed her, although every night after whispering her prayers to God, she laid herself with studied affection by his side.

“ She knows and yet she goes on making up to me,” he thought wrathfully. “ The pig ! ”

To Pyotr his wife was a familiar pathway along which he could walk blindfold without stumbling, and he did not want to think of her. Yet he remembered that Ulyana Baimakova, who sat slowly dying in her arm-chair, swollen all over, and her face an unsightly purple, regarded him with ever-increasing animosity. The tears would stream from her eyes, once so beautiful but now dim and watery, and her twisted lips would move, though her paralysed tongue hung helplessly from her mouth, powerless to say anything. All she could do was to give him a squeeze with the half-dead fingers of her left hand.

Yes, she was conscious. He was sorry for her.

Still it cost him a great effort of will to break off his disgraceful liaison with Zinaida, and no sooner had he done it than he became the prey of distressing thoughts which rioted in his mind side by side with his drunken reminiscences of the winter. It seemed as if a second Pyotr Artamonov had come into existence, who lived with him and always walked behind him. He felt that his double was growing and becoming sentient, hindering the real Pyotr Artamonov in everything he was called upon to undertake. Making skilful use of the moments when the real Pyotr was absorbed in thought, this second self would rush upon him, like a gust of wind round a corner, and whisper disagreeable and malignant thoughts into his ear :

“ You work like a horse, but why ? You have enough to last you a lifetime. It is time your son did some work. Out of your love for him you murdered a boy. You have become fond of a lady and begun a dissolute life.”

Life always seemed darker and duller after ideas like these had passed through his mind. Somehow he failed to notice the precise moment when Ilya changed into a grown-up man. Nor was this the only event which went by without his noticing it. His daughter Yelena was betrothed and married by Natalya to the son of a rich jeweller—a vivacious young man with a black moustache—and went to live in the chief town of the government, and this also escaped his notice. Among other things which escaped him was the death of his mother-in-law, who finally died of suffocation one sultry June day at noon, just before a thunderstorm. They hardly had time to lay her on the bed before a peal of thunder rolled overhead and frightened everyone.

“Shut the windows and doors!” Natalya shouted, raising her hands to her ears. Her mother’s huge leg fell from her hands, the heel of her foot striking the floor with a dull thud.

It seemed to Pyotr Artamonov that he did not at once recognize his son in the tall, slim man who entered the room, dressed in a light grey suit, with a moustache plainly visible upon his thin swarthy face. Yakov, who was broad and fat and wore a schoolboy’s blouse, looked more like himself. His sons said how-do-you-do politely and sat down.

“So now your grandmother is dead too!” said Pyotr, pacing up and down the office.

Ilya, who was lighting a cigarette, said nothing, and it was Yakov who replied in a voice which Pyotr did not recognize as his:

“It is a good thing it happened during the holidays, or I could not have come.”

Artamonov paid no attention to this foolish remark from his younger son. He was watching Ilya’s face, which had altered considerably and grown much stronger. His blue eyes were more sunken, and his hair was darker and covered his forehead, making it look less high than before. It was amusing, and at the same time rather embarrassing, to think he had pulled this thoughtful, soberly dressed man by the hair. In fact he could not believe he ever had. Yakov, on the other hand, had grown

up without altering. He had merely increased in size and remained as plump as ever, with the same glittering eyes and childish mouth.

"You are quite grown up, Ilya!" said Artamonov. "Well, now you must see how the business is run, and in three years' time you will stand at the helm."

Ilya was playing with a cigarette-case which had a broken corner and was made of some root.

"No, I shan't," he said, looking his father in the face. "I am going on with my studies."

"For long?"

"For four or five years."

"Indeed! And what shall you study?"

"History."

Artamonov did not like to see his son smoking, and noticed also that his cigarette-case was cheap. He might have bought a better one. Still less did he like his intention of studying and the fact that he had mentioned it the moment after his arrival.

Pointing out of the window at the roof of the factory, where a slender chimney was puffing out steam and whence there came a muttering sound of work, he made an effort to speak gently.

"There is history puffing away!" he said persuasively. "That's the history you must study. Our job is weaving linen. History is not the work for us. I am fifty. It is time you took my place."

"Miron will take your place, or Yakov. Miron will be an engineer," said Ilya, and putting his hand outside the window, he shook the ash from his cigarette.

"Miron is my nephew, not my son," Artamonov reminded him. "But let us talk about this later on."

His children got up and went out, followed by the aggrieved and astonished gaze of their father. How was it that they had nothing to say to him? They had been with him for five minutes and in that time one of them had made a stupid remark and yawned sleepily, while the other had filled the room with tobacco smoke and at once caused him distress. Now they

were walking about the court-yard, and he could hear Ilya's voice say :

"Let us go and look at the river."

"No, I am tired after the journey."

The river would not have flowed away even if they had waited till to-morrow, thought Artamonov, and there was their mother grieving over their grandmother's death and making preparations for the funeral.

Repressing his habit of hurrying to meet unpleasantness in order to thrust it aside as soon as possible and thereby evade it, Pyotr gave Ilya a week's respite, during which he noticed that he addressed the workmen as "you" and at night sat with Tikhon and Seraphim at the court-yard gate and carried on long conversations with them. From the window he could even overhear the sound of Tikhon's languid voice and his flow of silly talk.

"Yes, that is it. To be a beggar is to have nothing at all. The truth is, Pyotr Ilyich, that if some people were not greedy, there would be enough for everybody."

"I know that!" cackled Seraphim. "I heard that—long ago. . . ."

Yakov's behaviour was easier to understand. He ran about the factory buildings, casting soft glances at the girls, and climbed up on to the stable-roof to look at the river, where the women bathed at dinner-time.

Tuesday was dreamy, still, and rather grey. A fine drizzle fell idly to the ground for an hour in the early morning, but at midday the sun looked out, took an unwilling peep at the factory and the wedge of water formed by the two rivers, and then hid behind the clouds, burying itself in their soft curves just as Natalya nightly buried her rosy-cheeked face in down pillows.

"Where is your brother?" Artamonov asked Yakov before tea.

"I don't know. He has been sitting under a pine tree on the hill up there."

"Give him a call. No, you needn't. Tell me, how do you get on together?"

He thought he saw the shadow of a smile on Yakov's face, as he said :

"All right. We are good friends."

"Are you really though? Tell me the truth."

Yakov dropped his eyes and thought a little.

"We are not agreed in our ideas."

"Ideas about what?"

"About things in general."

"How is that?"

"He is always buried in books. I simply use my own wits and go by what I see."

"I see," said Artamonov, unable to question him in greater detail.

Throwing a canvas overcoat over his shoulders and taking the stick which Alexei had given him—its top was a bird's claw in silver, holding a malachite ball—he went out of the court-yard and took a peep from beneath his palms at the river and the hill—there was Ilya in a white shirt lying under a tree.

"The sand is rather damp to-day. He may catch cold, the careless boy!"

Scrupulously weighing every word he had to say to him, Artamonov slowly approached, trampling down the brittle grey blades of grass which cracked beneath his feet. Ilya was lying on his face reading a fat book and tapping the pages with a pencil. At the sound of footsteps he twisted his supple young neck round, and catching sight of his father, placed the pencil between the pages of the book and shut it with a loud slam. Then he sat up, and leaning his back against the bole of the pine cast an affectionate glance at his father's face. The elder Artamonov was out of breath, and he too sat down on a swollen root, curved in the form of an arch.

"I won't talk business to-day. There is plenty of time still. We will just have a chat."

Ilya, however, who was clasping his arms round his knees, said softly :

"This is how it is, father. I have decided to consecrate myself to science."

"To consecrate yourself!" repeated Artamonov. "Like a priest."

He wanted to say this jokingly, but he could hear that his words sounded surly, almost angry, and in his vexation with himself he struck the sand with his stick. At once something incomprehensible happened, something quite uncalled-for. The blue in Ilya's eyes grew dark and his pencilled brows met in a frown.

"I won't be a manufacturer," he began with ill-natured persistence, tossing his hair back from his forehead. "I am not fit for such work."

"That's the way Tikhon talks," Artamonov broke in with a smile.

Ilya paid no attention to this, but began explaining why he did not want to be a manufacturer or, broadly speaking, the owner of any kind of business. He went on talking for a long time, ten minutes at least, and every now and then Artamonov caught a remark which had a glimmer of truth in it and which seemed to provide a satisfactory answer to his own confused thoughts, but on the whole he saw clearly that Ilya was talking childish nonsense.

"Stop!" he said, thrusting his stick into the sand close to Ilya's foot. "Wait, that's not right. That is nonsense. There must be someone at the head. The people can't get on without someone to lead them. No one is going to work if he can't make any profit. One is always hearing people say: 'What profit is it to me?' That is the pivot on which everything turns. Look at the number of proverbs there are: 'He would be a saint through and through if there were no craving for gain in his heart'; 'Even the saint says his prayers to gain something'; and, 'Even an inanimate thing like a machine must have grease.'"

He spoke without any agitation, recalling every proverb which fitted the case and spreading the fat of their wisdom lavishly over his discourse. He was pleased at being able to talk without ever being at a loss for a word, and was sure the conversation would end in his favour. Ilya said nothing. He was merely flinging the sand from one hand to the other, sifting

out the red pine-needles and blowing them off the palm of his hand.

"All that does not convince me," he said suddenly, in a tone as calm as his father's. "Life on those principles is no longer possible."

Artamonov raised himself with the aid of his stick. Ilya did not help him.

"I see. You think your father is not speaking the truth?"

"There is another side to the truth."

"That's a lie. There is no other side." And waving his stick in the direction of the factory, he said: "There stands truth, over there! Your grandfather started it. I have made it my life's work, and now it is your turn. That's all. What are you after all? Have we worked so as to keep you in idleness? Do you want to lead the life of a God-fearing man on the fruit of another's toil? It is not a bad idea of yours! History! A fig for history! History is not a girl. You can't marry it. What is this tomfoolery called history? What is the good of it? I shan't allow you to lead an idle life. . . ."

Feeling that his anger was getting the better of him, Pyotr Artamonov tried to smooth down what he had said.

"I understand your wanting to live in Moscow. It is gayer there. Alexei finds that too. . . ."

"Give me your permission to study," said Ilya, raising his book and blowing the grains of sand out of it.

"I refuse my permission!" roared Artamonov, thrusting his stick into the sand. "Don't ask for it."

Then Ilya stood up too, and looking over his father's shoulder with a blanching face, said in a low voice:

"Well then, I must do without your permission."

"You daren't!"

"You can't forbid a man to live as he likes," said Ilya with a shake of his head.

"A man? You are my son, not a man. What sort of man are you? Everything you have is mine."

This came out of its own accord. Artamonov ought not to have said it. And so he softened his tone and said with a reproachful shake of his head:

"Is this the way you repay me for my care for you? *Ekh*, you bad boy!"

He saw that Ilya was flushing and trying to hide his trembling hands in his trouser pockets, but that they refused to find their way there. And fearing that he was going to say something more, something which would perhaps be irreparable, he hastily intervened.

"I murdered someone for your sake . . . perhaps . . ."

Artamonov added "perhaps" because as soon as he had uttered the first word, he realized it was impossible at such a moment to explain himself to a boy who evidently did not wish to understand him.

"He'll ask who it was in a moment," he thought, and strode rapidly down the crumbling hillside.

"You have murdered more than one person," said Ilya, addressing the back of his head in a deafening tone. "The whole cemetery over there is full of people who have been murdered by the factory."

Artamonov stopped and turned round to see Ilya with outstretched arm pointing his book at the crosses which were outlined against the grey sky. As the sand crunched under his feet, he remembered that he had heard him insult the factory and the cemetery only a few minutes before; and in his anxiety to hide his slip of the tongue, which it was imperative that Ilya should forget, he advanced quickly upon him like a bear, trying to frighten him by brandishing his stick and shouting:

"What did you say, you scoundrel?"

Ilya sprang behind the trunk of the tree.

"Think what you are doing!" he exclaimed.

Artamonov struck the trunk with his stick, which broke in two, and then flung the broken piece at Ilya's feet in such a way that it ran slantwise into the sand and remained there with its green ball sticking up in the air.

"I'll make you clean out lavatories!" he threatened.

And he ran staggering off downhill, feeling that his reason was being driven backwards and forwards across words of grief and anger like a shuttle across a tangled warp.

"I'll turn him out of the house. He'll be forced to come



back through want. Then he shall clean out lavatories. But don't behave like a fool!"

And so he went on breaking off the thread of his thoughts in short lengths from a rapidly revolving ball. At the same time he realized that his behaviour was not what it ought to be and that he was greatly exaggerating the extent of his wrong.

When he came out on to the bank of the Oka, he sat down wearily on a sandy scarp, and wiping the sweat from his face, began gazing at the river. A shoal of dace were swimming about in a shallow little creek, making stitches through the water like steel needles. Then a bream appeared with an air of importance and dispersed them. After swimming about for a little, he turned over on his side and glanced up at the dim sky through a little red eye, sending up rings which floated on the water like circles of bright smoke.

"I'll settle your fate for you!" said Artamonov aloud, raising a threatening finger at him.

He heard his words ring false and looked round him. The quiet flow of the river was washing away his anger. The warm grey stillness was filling him with stupefying and astonishing thoughts. And the most astonishing of them all was that his son, who had been the object of his unceasing love and anxious thought for twenty years, had slipped out of his heart in a few moments, leaving nothing behind but an angry pain. Artamonov was sure that every day for twenty years his thoughts had been fixed untiringly on Ilya. For twenty years he had been living on his hopes and his love for him, waiting for him to make his mark.

"Like the flare of a match!" he thought. "After it—nothing! Why is it?"

The grey sky was turning almost pink, but in one place there appeared a brighter spot which resembled the oily sheen on well-worn cloth. Then the waning moon looked out. The air grew fresh and damp and a mist floated like faint smoke over the river.

When Artamonov reached home, Natalya, already undressed, was frowningly engaged in cutting her toe-nails, with her left leg resting on the round knee of her right one.

## DECADENCE

"Where have you sent Ilya?" she asked, with a sidelong glance at him.

"To the devil!" he replied, taking off his clothes.

"You are always in a temper," sighed Natalya. Artamonov made no reply. He merely sniffed and moved about noisily on purpose. Rain began to splash against the window-panes and a wet rustle floated through the garden.

"Ilya is already very proud of his learning."

"His mother is a fool."

Ilya's mother sniffed. Then she crossed herself and lay down in bed, while Pyotr went on insulting her with gusto as he undressed.

"What can you do? Nothing. The children are not afraid of you. What have you taught them? All you can do is to eat and sleep and put grease on your face."

"But who sent them to school?" said Natalya, speaking into her pillow. "I said that . . ."

"Be quiet!"

He too relapsed into silence, listening to the sound of the rain, which was now falling more heavily on the leaves of the bird-cherry tree which Nikita had planted.

"It was a happy lot the hunchback chose. No children. No business. Just bees. I would not even keep bees, but let each of them gather honey for itself, as it liked."

Turning over on her back as carefully as if she were lying on ice, Natalya touched Pyotr's shoulder with her warm cheek.

"Have you had a quarrel with Ilya?"

Ashamed of telling her what had passed between him and their son, he muttered:

"One does not quarrel with children, one scolds them."

"He has gone off to the town."

"He'll come back. He won't get fed anywhere for nothing. He'll just take a sniff at what it smells like, and then come back. Go to sleep and don't disturb me."

"We must not let Yakov go to school any more," he said after a minute.

And after another minute:

"I shall go to the fair the day after to-morrow. Are you listening?"

"Yes, I am listening."

"I wonder what it is like?" pondered Artamonov as he closed his eyes, but all he saw before him was a face with a large forehead, which reminded him of the insufferably insolent glitter in Ilya's eyes.

"He treated his father like a workman, the scoundrel! He pushed me aside like a beggar!"

What astonished him was the mysterious rapidity with which the rupture had come about. It seemed as if Ilya had long ago decided to break away. But what had impelled him to do it? And as he recalled the boy's sharp criticisms, he thought:

"It was that setter, Miron, who egged him on. As for business doing people harm—those are Tikhon's ideas. The fool, the fool! Whom has he been listening to? But he has studied himself! And what has he studied? He is sorry for the workpeople, but not for his father, and runs away so as to keep his ideas of what is right to himself."

At this thought his anger against Ilya flamed up more brightly than ever.

"No, you are making a mistake. You shan't escape me!"

Then he remembered Nikita who had drawn aside and escaped into a quiet corner.

"They all put me in harness," he thought, "and run away themselves."

But he at once detected that this was unjust. Alexei had not run away. He loved the business just as his father had done. He was greedy—insatiably greedy, and all he did was clever and simple. Artamonov remembered saying to him after there had been a drunken brawl at the factory:

"The people are getting spoilt."

"I can see they are," Alexei had agreed.

"They are always angry about something or other. It seems as if they were looking out of one pair of eyes."

Alexei had agreed with this too.

"That's true too," he had said. "I remember Tikhon once looking at father with the same expression in his eyes, when

father was wrestling with some soldiers at your wedding. Afterwards he started wrestling himself. Do you remember ? ”

“ Yes, but why bring in Tikhon ? He is a cripple. ”

Then Alexei had spoken seriously :

“ You are always saying that the people are becoming spoilt. But surely that is no concern of ours. That is a matter for priests, school-teachers, and who else shall I say—doctors of different kinds and those in authority. It is for them to see that the people are not spoilt. That is their stock-in-trade. But you and I are buyers. Everything gets spoilt by degrees, my friend. You yourself are growing old, and so am I. Still, you surely would not tell a girl to end her life because she would one day be an old woman ! ”

“ A clever devil ! ” Artamonov had thought. “ And simple-minded. ”

And as he listened to his brother’s animated talk and the new sayings with which he embellished it, he had envied his good spirits. Once more his thoughts turned to Nikita. He had been marked out by their father for the rôle of comforter, but had involved himself in a stupid affair with a woman and was gone.

Artamonov pondered over a great deal during that rainy night. Strange thoughts kept forcing their way, like a stream of smoke, through the bitterness of his reflections—thoughts which seemed to be whispered into his ears by the dark patter of rain and which prevented him from exculpating himself.

“ How am I to blame ? ” he kept asking, and although he could find no answer to his question, he felt it was not a superfluous one. At dawn he suddenly decided to go to his brother in the monastery. There, perhaps, in the society of a man who lived away from temptations and anxieties, he might find something which would bring him comfort, and even resolution.

But as he drove up to the monastery behind a pair of post-horses, after being shaken to pieces by jogging along country roads, he thought :

“ Standing still in a corner is a simple matter. You try and run about the street ! A cucumber doesn’t decay in the cellar, but in the sunlight it at any rate rots away alive. ”

## DECADENCE

He had not seen his brother for four years. His last meeting with him had been dull and cold, and Pyotr had thought the hunchback seemed disconcerted and displeased at his arrival. He had shrunk into his shell and hidden away like a snail, and had talked in rather an acid tone, not about God or himself and his relatives, but only about pilgrims, the needs of the monastery and the poverty of the people, and even this had been an obvious effort to him. When Pyotr had offered him money, he had said in a quiet, careless tone:

"Give it to the Father Superior. I don't want it."

It was evident that all the monks looked upon Father Nikodim with respect. The Father Superior, who was a huge, bony, hairy man, deaf in one ear, and looked like a wood-demon dressed in a cassock, had gazed into Pyotr's face with his cerise black eyes and said in much too loud a voice:

"Father Nikodim is an ornament to our poor monastery."

The monastery, which stood on a low hill, enclosed by bronze pine-trees and hidden from sight beneath their thick crests, greeted Artamonov with the thin sound of weekday bells, ringing out their summons to evening service. The gate was opened by the porter, who was as straight and long as a pole and had an insignificant little head like a child's, on which he wore a faded and crumpled skull-cap.

"W-welc-come . . ." he stammered out, choking over his words.

And next he half breathed, half hissed:

"C-come in."

A bank of dark blue cloud hung motionless above the monastery, covering half the sky and reducing everything beneath its pressure to a state of heavy, damp, stifling apathy, which the clang of the copper bells was powerless to dispel.

"It is too heavy for one man to lift," said the lay-brother of the guest-house, apologetically, rapping with his little black fist on the box filled with presents for Nikita, as he tried to pull it out of the cart.

Tired and dusty, Pyotr made his way slowly through the garden towards his brother's white cell, which lay snugly hidden among cherry and apple trees. On his way he reflected that

he had come in vain. It would have been better to go to the fair. The road through the forest, which had been rough and encumbered with roots, had shaken him up and thrown all his distressing thoughts into confusion, substituting for them a constrained melancholy and a longing for rest and forgetfulness.

"It would have been rather nice to be on the spree!" he thought to himself. He caught sight of his brother sitting on a bench in a semicircle of limes, with a dozen pilgrims ranged in front of him like the figures in some familiar picture. There was a black-bearded merchant in a canvas overcoat, whose foot was swathed in rags and thrust into a rubber galosh; a fat old man like a eunuch money-changer; a lad with long hair, prominent cheek-bones and eyes like a fish, who wore a soldier's capote; and Murzin, the Dryomov baker, a rowdy, drunken fellow, who stood stock-still like a thief before his judges.

"It is true that God is far away," he said hoarsely.

Nikita was drawing on the trampled ground with a little white staff, teaching the people, but not looking at them.

"The lower man is, the higher and more remote from him is God, who is driven away by the stench of our corruption in sin."

"He is comforting them," thought Artamonov, smiling to himself.

"God sees that our faith is unproductive. But what is the use to Him of faith without works? Where is our help for one another? Where is our love? And what do we pray about? Always about tiny trifles. We ought to pray, of course, but still . . ."

Raising his eyes, he looked fixedly at Pyotr and for a moment surveyed him from head to foot in silence. Then he slowly raised his staff, as if he were lifting a great weight with which he intended to strike someone, and stood up, and feebly bowing his head made the sign of the cross over the people, interrupting his prayer to remark:

"Here is my brother who has come to see me."

A bald-headed old man glanced unpleasantly at Pyotr out of his rounded copper-coloured eyes and crossed himself with a bold gesture which was evidently intentional.

"God be with you," added Nikita.

The people dispersed like a herd from pasture, the old man supporting the merchant with the bad foot by one elbow, and Murzin the baker taking him by the other.

"Well, how are you? Give me your blessing."

With a long arm winged with a black cassock sleeve, Father Nikodim pushed away the folded, upturned hands which his brother stretched out to him.

"I was not expecting you," he said in a quiet, joyless tone.

He waved his staff in the direction of his cell and walked on in front of Pyotr, moving jerkily along on his bent legs and keeping one hand on his chest, near the heart.

"You have grown older," remarked Pyotr with concern.

"Yes, that is life. My legs have begun to hurt. Our place is damp."

Nikita seemed to have grown more hunchbacked than ever. His right shoulder and the angle made by his spine had lifted, and bent his body nearer to the ground, making him broader still in the process, and as he crept blind and bent along the gritty rubble path he looked like a spider with its head torn off. In his clean, narrow cell he seemed a little larger but more terrible than ever. When he took off his cowl, the bones of his skull gleamed dully like those of a dead man, and his head was seen to be half bald as if it had been stripped of skin—ragged locks of grey hair hanging only from his temples, from behind his ears and from the back of his head. His face too was nothing but skin and bone, the colour of wax, and his faded eyes no longer lighted it up; their gaze being apparently concentrated on the tip of his large and flabby nose, beneath which his lips, which had withered away to two dark lines, moved without making a sound. His mouth, grown larger than ever, formed a deep cavity across his face, and a piece of musty-looking grey hair on his upper lip added even more to the weirdness and unpleasantness of his appearance.

The monk spoke to a lay-brother—a chubby-faced lad like a bathing-man—and his voice was as quiet as if he were straining his ear to catch something, and as slow as if he found difficulty in remembering the words he wanted.

"A samovar," he said, "some bread and some honey."

"How softly you talk!"

"My teeth have crumbled to pieces."

The monk seated himself by the table in an arm-chair made of wood and painted white.

"Are all of you alive?"

"Yes, we are."

"Is Tikhon alive?"

"Yes, he is. Why do you ask?"

"He has not been to see me for a long time."

There was a pause. When Nikita moved his hand, his cassock made a noise like a cockroach, and the sound made Pyotr feel more bored than ever.

"I have brought you some presents. Tell them to bring the box in. There is some wine in it. Are you allowed wine?"

"We are not strict here," replied Nikita with a sigh. "It is a hard life. There have even been some drunkards since people began visiting the monastery so assiduously. They drink, because what else is there for them to do? The breath of the world comes and poisons them. Monks, too, are men."

"I hear that a great many people come to see you."

"Yes, they do," said the monk, "fools that they are. They go round and round looking for righteousness and a righteous man. They want to be shown how to live. They have gone on living and living, and now they can't go on any longer. They have not the patience."

Artamonov felt that the monk's words were disquieting.

"They have been spoilt," he muttered. "They were patient when they were serfs, but they can't be patient now they are free. They have been given too much rein."

Nikita said nothing.

"They were not always roaming about when they were owned by their masters."

The hunchback flashed a glance at him and dropped his eyes.

And so they talked on, groping for words and interspersing their conversation with lengthy pauses, until the lay-brother brought the samovar, fragrant lime honey and warm bread



which was still giving off faint fumes of yeast. After watching attentively while the white-haired lay-brother sprawled about on the floor, opening the lid of the box, Pyotr placed a pot of fresh caviare and two bottles on the table.

"Port-wine," Nikita read out. "That is the wine the Father Superior likes. He is a clever man. He knows a great deal."

"And I know so little," confessed Pyotr, trying to draw him out.

"You know all you need to know. What is the good of knowing more? To know more than you need, only does harm."

The monk heaved a cautious sigh and Pyotr thought he detected a shade of bitterness in his words. In the darkness, dimly illumined by the light of the ikon-lamp in the corner and of the cheap yellow glass of the lamp on the table, Nikita's cassock shone with dirt and grease. Noticing the calculated avidity with which he gulped down a glass of Madeira, Pyotr thought sarcastically:

"He knows what is good."

After each glass Nikita squeezed some crumb out of the loaf with his thin, very white fingers, dipped it in honey, and slowly chewed it, making quivering movements with his scanty grey beard. The wine made no perceptible impression on him beyond bringing a little light into his bleary eyes, which remained concentrated as before on the tip of his nose. Pyotr drank carefully, not wishing to appear drunk in front of his brother, and as he drank, he thought:

"He hasn't asked after Natalya. And last time he didn't ask after her either. He is ashamed. He hasn't asked about anybody. We are worldly and he is saintly. People come in search of him."

He brushed his beard angrily over his waistcoat.

"You have hidden yourself away very cleverly here," he said, pulling his ear. "You did well."

"It was all right at first, but now it is not so good. There are too many pilgrims. And these receptions . . ."

"Receptions?" Pyotr smiled. "As at the dentist's."

"I want to go somewhere more remote," said the monk, pouring some wine carefully into their glasses.

"Where it is quieter," finished Pyotr, and again he smiled, but the monk merely gulped down his wine and licked his lips with a tongue like a dark rag.

"The increase in the number of restless people is very noticeable," he began, nodding his skull-like head. "They are hiding away. They want to escape from their troubles——"

"I haven't noticed it," objected Pyotr, knowing he was not speaking the truth. "It was you who went and hid yourself," was what he wanted to say.

"—And the anxieties which follow them like a shadow."

Reproaches framed themselves of their own accord upon his lips. He wanted to argue with Nikita, and even to scold him.

"Man is looking for anxieties," he said in an angry tone, thinking of Ilya. "He wants hardship! Mind your own business and don't show off how clever you are, and then you will spend your life in peace and quiet."

But Nikita, who was absorbed in his own thoughts, could not have heard this remark, for he suddenly shook his angular frame as though he were waking from a dream. With his cassock flowing from him in streams of black and his lips curled in a wry smile, he began to speak very distinctly with a semblance of anger in his voice:

"They come here and ask me to teach them! And how do I know what to teach them? I am not a wise man. That's an invention of the Father Superior's. I know nothing and I'm like a man who has been unjustly condemned. I have been condemned to teach! And why am I condemned to teach?"

"That is a hint," thought the elder Artamonov. "He wants to complain."

He realized that there were grounds for these complaints against his fate, and in fact had expected to hear about them on his previous visits. So pulling his ear, he indirectly anticipated him:

"Many people complain against their fate, but it is not the slightest use."

"Yes, one does not see any contented people," said the

hunchback, directing his gaze towards the corner where the lamp burnt before the ikon.

"When Father was alive, he used to urge you to comfort people. So you must be a comforter."

Nikita stretched his mouth in a smile, then gathering his grey beard in his hand, wiped his smile away with it, and went on sowing the darkness with words, which, though they jarred upon Pyotr, stimulated his curiosity and made him watchfully expectant of danger.

"They instil it into me and others that I am wise. It is done of course to benefit the monastery and attract people here. But for me it is an arduous duty. A stern task, my friend! How am I to comfort them? 'Be patient,' I say. But I can see that they are all tired of being patient. 'Have hope,' I say. But what are they to hope for? God is no comfort to them. There is a baker who comes here . . ."

"That is our baker Murzin. He is a drunkard," said the elder Artamonov, wishing to distract his attention.

"He imagines he is judge of God. According to him, God is not master of the world. And there are a number of insolent people like him nowadays. There is a beardless man who comes here too. Did you notice him? He is a malicious fellow, the enemy of the whole world. They come and torture me with questions. What can you say to them? They come here for the purpose of disturbing me."

The monk's talk grew more animated. Pyotr, remembering what he had been like on former visits, noticed that he no longer blinked his eyes in the guilty way he had done before. Formerly the hunchback had been quieted by his sense of guilt, for a guilty man must not complain. But now he was grumbling and declaring that he had been unjustly condemned, and Artamonov was afraid of his saying:

"It was you who condemned me!"

He frowned, and playing with his watch-chain, sought for words with which to defend himself.

"Yes," said the hunchback, and it seemed as if he were secretly content with the state of things he was grumbling at. "People are becoming more and more troublesome and their

ideas more outrageous. There was a man who stayed with us for a fortnight not long ago—well-educated and still young, but apparently frightened and not quite himself. The Father Superior came to me with a suggestion: ‘You strengthen him,’ he says. But I can’t remember other people’s ideas. He was a well-educated man and kept me on the rack for hours together while he went on talking and talking. But I could not even understand the words he used, much less his ideas. ‘One cannot possibly admit,’ he says, ‘that the Devil is master of our flesh. That would imply that there were two gods and would be an insult to the Body of Christ which we receive in Holy Communion: *Take the Body of Christ, eat the source of immortality.*’ He also spoke blasphemy. ‘Supposing,’ he says, ‘that God had horns. There must still be only one God, otherwise life would be impossible.’ He tired me out and I forgot all Father Fyodor’s suggestions. ‘Your flesh,’ I shouted at him, ‘is a passing phase and your spirit is destruction.’ The Father Superior found fault with me afterwards: ‘What did you blurt out profane nonsense like that for?’ he says. Yes, that is how it is. . . .”

To Pyotr, this story showed his brother in a pitiful light, seemed ridiculous. Still, it soothed him somewhat.

“It is difficult to talk about God,” he murmured.

“Yes, it is,” agreed Father Nikodim, and in a bitter, oily voice he asked: “Do you remember Father telling us we were only workmen and that such knowledge was too deep for us?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Yes, Father Fyodor suggests that I should read books! And I do, but to me a book is merely a vague murmur like a distant forest. A book is no answer to the questions of to-day. Such ideas have sprung up nowadays that no book can cover them. Sects have spread everywhere, and people argue just as naturally as they recount their dreams or the after-effects of a drunken fit. There is that man Murzin . . .”

The monk drank the rest of his port-wine and chewed some bread. Then rolling some crumbs of bread into a pellet, he proceeded to push it along the table with his finger.

“Father Fyodor says,” he went on, “that our reason is the

source of all our misfortunes. The Devil first rouses it up just as one rouses a bad-tempered dog, and then teases it until, like a bad-tempered dog, it barks at everyone indiscriminately. It may be true, but it is a mortifying truth to accept. There is a doctor here, a simple light-hearted fellow, who thinks otherwise. He says that our reason is a child, to whom everything is a plaything and an amusement. Like a child, it wants to see how this thing and that thing are made, and what there is inside them, and of course it breaks them."

"I suppose you are saying a dangerous thing?" observed Pyotr. He felt alarmed and shaken by his brother's words, the unexpected shrewdness of which filled him with astonishment and fright, and he longed once more to crush and humiliate him.

"He has had too much to drink," he thought, trying to calm himself.

It was stuffy in the cell, and the acid smell of charcoal and lamp oil which hung about quenched Pyotr's ideas. Against the little black square where the window was, appeared the leaves of some plant—as motionless as if they were made of iron. And, like a spider, his brother went on weaving his web with quiet persistence.

"All ideas are dangerous," he said. "Specially the simple ones. Take Tikhon's for example."

"He is half daft."

"No, you are wrong! He is a serious-minded man. At first I was even afraid of talking to him. I wanted to, but I was afraid! But when Father died I was drawn very close to Tikhon. You know you did not love Father as much as I did. You and Alexei were not infuriated by the injustice of his death, but Tikhon was. As for me, it was not the stupidity of the nun which enraged me at that time. It was God, and Tikhon noticed it at once. 'Look,' he says, 'the gnats are alive, while a man' . . ."

"You are raving!" remarked Pyotr severely. "You have had too much to drink. What nun do you mean?"

Nikita went on persistently: "Tikhon says that if God is master of the world, it ought to rain at the proper time, when

it is good for the corn and for mankind. Nor are all fires caused by man. Forests are set on fire by lightning. And why should we have to die because Cain sinned? What use can God have for all kinds of deformed creatures? Hunchbacks, for instance, what is the good of them to Him?"

"Aha! Now we are coming to it!" thought Pyotr, smiling into his beard and feeling that his brother's complaints against God were very soothing. It was a good thing that the monk made no complaints against his relations.

"It was impossible to understand Cain. This was the chain with which Tikhon bound me. It began the very day of father's death. I thought to myself: 'I'll go into a monastery and these ideas will fade from my mind.' But no, they didn't. And I am still absorbed by them."

"You never said anything about this before."

"You can't say everything all at once. And I should probably never have spoken about it if the pilgrims had not disturbed me. My conscience troubles me. It is dangerous too, and I keep wondering whether some idea of Tikhon's won't find its way into my teaching. No, he is a clever fellow, although possibly I don't like him. He thinks of you too. 'There is a man,' he says, 'who has toiled for his children, but they are strangers to him.'"

"What did he say that for?" asked Pyotr angrily. "What can he know?"

"He does know though. Business, he says, is a delusion."

"Yes, I have heard him. I must dismiss that fool. Besides, he knows too much about our family."

Artamonov said this with a desire to remind Nikita of the distressing night when Tikhon had taken him down from the halter, but he was really thinking about the Nikonov boy. The monk, however, did not see the allusion, and after raising his wine-glass to his mouth and dipping his tongue in the wine, he licked his lips and went on in a tinny voice:

"Tikhon too has been wronged. He even went so far as to break away from everybody, as a ruined man does. . . ."

Pyotr had to distract the monk's attention from such thoughts.

"So you don't believe in God now?" he asked, surprised that the question which he had wanted to ask out of malice should sound so innocent.

"It is hard to know who does believe nowadays," replied the monk after a pause. "Everyone thinks a great deal, but there is no sign of faith. You oughtn't to think, if you believe. The man who talked about God as having horns said that . . ."

"Don't talk about it," said Pyotr admonishingly as he looked round him. "All this comes from being bored and not having enough to do. We ought all to be harnessed in iron horse-collars."

"No, it is impossible to believe in two gods," persisted Father Nikodim.

The bell had already rung twice from the belfry and its measured beats fell upon the black window-pane.

"Are you going to the service?" asked Pyotr.

"I don't go. My legs don't allow me to stand."

"So you pray for us here, in your cell?"

The monk made no reply.

"Well, I should like to go to bed. I am tired after the journey."

Without a word Nikita laid his long arms upon the arms of his chair and raised his angular body cautiously.

"Mitya!" he called. "Mitri?"

Once more he sank into his seat.

"Forgive me," he said apologetically. "I forgot that my lay-brother sleeps at the guest-house. I sent him away. I wanted to talk freely, and they are all tell-tales and backbiters here."

He gave his brother an unnecessarily long-winded explanation of the way to the guest-house, and when Pyotr went out into the darkness and the cool, dusty rain, he thought to himself:

"The chatterbox did not want me to leave."

And suddenly, with a familiar sense of dread, Artamonov felt he was again walking on the edge of a ravine into which he would fall the next moment. He quickened his steps and, stretching his arms out in front of him, groped about with his

fingers in the dusty dampness of the night, keeping his gaze fixed unbrokenly upon the greasy spot made by the distant lantern.

"No," he thought hurriedly as he stumbled along, "all this is no use to me. I'll go away to-morrow. It's no use. What has happened? Ilya will come back! I must be firm. Look how Alexei has increased his position! He might even outdo me."

He thought about Alexei with all his might because he did not want to think about Nikita and Tikhon. But when he lay down on his hard pallet in the monastic guest-house he was assailed once more by harassing thoughts about the monk and the *dvornik*. What sort of man was Tikhon? His shadow was falling on everything round him. The echo of his words was to be heard in Ilya's childish talk and Nikita was bewitched with his ideas.

"A comforter!" he said to himself, thinking of Nikita. "But Seraphim can give comfort, though he is only a simple carpenter."

He could not sleep. The gnats were biting him, and from the other side of the wall came the murmur of three voices, which Pyotr thought must belong to Murzin the baker, the merchant with the bad foot, and the man with the beardless face.

"They are probably carousing," he thought.

From time to time the monastery watchman struck a blow on an iron plate with a hammer. Then suddenly there came a summons to matins, timid and hurried as if it were too late, and at the sound Pyotr fell asleep.

Nikita came to see him looking just as he had done the day before in the garden, with the same malevolent way of glancing at him up and down and sideways as if he were a stranger. Having hastily washed and dressed himself, Artamonov ordered a lay-brother to let him have a horse as far as the nearest posting-station.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked the monk, though without surprise. "I thought you were going to stay for a little."



"The business won't let me."

While they were drinking tea, Pyotr considered for a long time what question he would ask his brother. Then he remembered :

"You mean, you want to leave this place ? "

"I'm thinking of it. But they won't let me go."

"Why won't they ? "

"I'm a source of profit to them. I'm useful."

"I see. And where will you go ? "

"Perhaps I shall go on a pilgrimage."

"With your bad legs ? "

"Even legless men move about."

"That's true, they do," agreed Pyotr.

There was silence. Then Nikita said :

"Remember me to Tikhon."

"And to whom else ? "

"To everybody."

"All right. Why don't you inquire how Alexei is getting on ? "

"What is the good of inquiring ? I know he is getting on. Perhaps I shall go away from here soon."

"You can't go in the winter."

"Why not ? People travel even in the winter."

"It's true, they do," Pyotr agreed again, and offered his brother some money.

"Yes, let me have some. It will go towards repairing the mill. Won't you look in on the Father Superior ? "

"I haven't time. My horse is at the door."

The brothers embraced at parting, though it was awkward to embrace Nikita. He did not give Pyotr his blessing, his right hand being caught in the sleeve of his cassock, and Pyotr thought it had got caught there on purpose.

"Forgive me if I said too much yesterday," implored Nikita dully, as he leant his hump against Pyotr's stomach.

"Well, what of it ! We are brothers."

"One thinks and thinks at night . . ."

"Yes, yes ! Well, good-bye."

As he drove out of the monastery gates, Pyotr looked round

and saw his brother's figure standing out against the white wall of the guest-house like a stone.

"Good-bye," he murmured, and taking his cap off he received a thick sprinkling of fine rain upon his head. They were driving through a pine forest and it was very still, the only sound to be heard being the glassy tinkle of pine-needles beneath beady drops of rain. A monk was bouncing about on the box of the britzka and the horse was a bay and had bald ears.

"What do people mean," thought Pyotr, "when they say that God does not send rain at the proper time? All that is the result of evil, of envy and deformity. And of idleness. They have no troubles, and without trouble man is like a dog without a master."

Looking round with a shiver, Pyotr found that rain was really falling at the wrong time, and gloomy thoughts once more enveloped him like a grey cloud. In order to shake them off he drank vodka at every stage.

In the evening when the smoky town appeared in the distance, a panting train crossed the road, and with a whistle and a puff of steam, plunged into the earth and disappeared into a semi-circular hole.

### PART III

**I**N recalling his tempestuous days at the fair, Pyotr Artamonov felt a curious sense of bewilderment that almost amounted to dread. He could not believe that he was actually visualizing all that his memory kept bringing before him. Nor could he believe that he was being bodily boiled in a huge stone cauldron filled with the clamour and roar of music, singing and shouting, the sound of drunken rapture and the melancholy, heartrending howls of madmen. All this commotion was being stirred up and brewed by a big man with curly hair, who was dressed in a top-hat and a frock-coat, and had prominent owl-like eyes pasted on a blue clean-shaven face. He kept smacking his thick lips and bawling at Artamonov, and at the same time pushing him about and clasping him in his arms :

“Be quiet, you fool ! This is the baptism of Russia, don’t you understand ? The yearly baptism on the Volga and on the Oka !”

In face he was like a cook, and in dress like one of those men with torches who are hired to escort the bodies of rich men to the grave. Pyotr dimly remembered fighting with him, but afterwards they had drunk brandy mixed with ices, and the man had sobbed and said :

“Hark to the cry of the soul of Russia ! My father was a priest, but I am a blackguard.”

His voice, though deep and trumpet-like, was gentle, and he kept pouring out his oratory upon the crowd in a dark flood of unheard-of and irresistibly moving words.

“Corruption of the flesh !” he shouted. “A fight with the devil ! Throw the swine a foul tribute. Subdue the

rebellion in your body, Petya! If you have done no wrong, you don't repent, and if you don't repent you won't be saved. Wash your soul! We go to the bath-house to wash our bodies, don't we? But what of our souls? Our souls need a bath too. Give the soul of Russia her freedom—that tuneful soul, so holy, so great!”

Pyotr was moved to tears.

“The soul is an orphan,” he muttered, “an adopted child—that's it. It is forgotten and we have no pity on it.”

And everyone shouted:

“That's true. That's quite right!”

A bald-headed man who had a red beard, a fiery-red face and purple ears, and whose roundness made him unsteady on his legs, was spinning round like a top, screaming ecstatically like a woman:

“Styopa, you are speaking the truth! I adore you. I love you madly. There are three things I love madly: you, sour wine, and truth. You are right about the soul!”

And he also cried and sang:

“By death He overcame death.”

While Pyotr accompanied him with the words of Anton the idiot:

“And the cart has lost a wheel.”

He too thought that he loved black-coated Styopa, as he listened, enchanted, to his voice; and although an unusual word here and there frightened him, most of what he heard was sweetly and deeply moving, and made him feel that a door was being opened, a door leading from the noisy darkness of chaos into the clear light of peace. The words “tuneful soul” gave him particular pleasure. There was something very true and plaintive about them, and they blended themselves into a picture of a certain sultry week-day when a man with a grey beard, tall, old, and as thin as a skeleton, had stood in a congested street in Dryomov, wearily turning the handle of a barrel-organ. In front of the organ, holding her head very much in the air, had stood a little girl of twelve in a

crumpled blue dress, who had shut her eyes and sung in a strained and breaking voice :

“I ask of life no more than death can give—  
Freedom and rest, whether I die or live.”

With this little girl in mind, Artamonov murmured to the man with purple ears :

“The soul is tuneful! What he said is true!”

“Styopa?” the man with the red beard asked noisily.  
“Styopa knows everything. He has the key to every heart!”

And getting redder than ever, he screamed :

“Styopa, friend of humanity, speak! Advocate of Paradise, take us to some inaccessible cavern! I can endure anything. . . .”

The friend of humanity was the shepherd and leader of a band of dissipated manufacturers, and wherever he appeared with his drunken flock, there was always a blare of music and the sound of singing—now sad and heart-rending to the point of tears, now daring and accompanied by frenzied dancing. Of this music, all that remained in the aural memory were the dull thud of the big drum and the shrill, despairing whistle of a pipe. When they sang mournful, long-winded songs, the inn walls seemed to close in and stifle them, but when the chorus was lively and young men danced in gay and daring clothes the walls seemed to sway and bulge under pressure of a wind. Their mood fluctuated tempestuously, passing from joy to transports of grief, and there were moments when Pyotr Artamonov was consumed by such burning enthusiasm that he longed to do something extraordinary and staggering, like committing a murder, and then to fall on his knees at these people's feet and call out before the whole world :

“Try me and punish me with an awful death!”

They were at the “Samokat,” a mad inn where the floor turned slowly round, taking all the little tables, the guests and the waiters with it. The only things which remained stationary in the noisy saloon, which was as cram-full of guests as a pillow is of feathers, were the corners. As the circular floor moved round, it revealed in one corner a group of mad

musicians armed with brass trumpets, and in the second, a chorus composed of a crowd of women in different-coloured dresses with wreaths in their hair. In the third, the flames of the hanging lamps were reflected in the crockery and the bottles which stood on the buffet; and the fourth corner was cut off by the doors by which people came in, and from which they entered the revolving circle to sway and fall and wave their arms in the air, until they went off amid deafening peals of laughter.

Black-coated Styopa, the friend of humanity, explained the mystery to Artamonov.

"It is a simple idea, but a good one!" he said. "The floor rests on blocks, like a saucer on the tips of one's extended fingers. The blocks are attached to a post, from which two levers jut out horizontally. To each of these a pair of horses is harnessed, and they go round and turn the floor. Simple, isn't it? But there is some meaning in it. Remember this, Petya: everything has a hidden meaning of its own, alas!"

He raised his finger, on which there gleamed a greenish stone like a wolf's eye, towards the ceiling, but at that moment some merchant—a broad-chested fellow with a head like a dog—plucked Artamonov by the sleeve and stared at him with the glazed eyes of a dead man.

"What will Dunya say, eh?" he asked in a loud voice as if he were deaf. "Who are you?"

Without waiting for a reply, he proceeded to question another neighbour:

"Who are you? And what shall I tell Dunya, eh?"

Then he knocked over a chair and snorted.

"Pooh! Damnation! Let us go somewhere else!" he shouted furiously.

Afterwards he turned out to be a coachman, and from his seat on the box of a barouche, drawn by a pair of grey horses, he informed all the passers-by in a loud voice:

"We are going to see Paula! Come with us!"

They drove through the rain with five men inside the barouche, one of whom lay on Artamonov's legs, murmuring:

"He has cheated me, so I'll cheat him. He has taken me in, and I'll take him in. . . ."

In a market square, which lay on a hill shaped like a round loaf, the barouche upset. Pyotr fell out and hurt his head and elbow, and from where he sat on the wet turf, watched the red-haired man with the purple ears climb the hill and make for the enclosure of a mosque, bellowing out as he went along :

"Get out of my way! I want to be baptized a Tatar. I want to be a Mohammedan. Let me go!"

But black Styopa seized him by the legs, dragged him down the hill and led him away. A crowd of Persians, Tatars and Rumanians came running out of the shops and the caravan-serai, and an old man, dressed in a yellow dressing-gown and a green turban, threatened Pyotr with a stick.

"*Urus shaitan!*"

A copper-faced policeman set Pyotr on his feet.

"Brawling isn't allowed," he said.

Some coachmen who had driven up seated the drunken men in cabs and bore them away, but the friend of humanity who was driving in the front cab remained on his feet, shouting into his fist as though it were a speaking-trumpet. It had left off raining, but the sky was black and threatening in a way it never is in reality. Lightning was flashing over the huge block formed by the caravanserai, tearing clefts in the darkness, and it was very terrifying to hear the horse's hoofs beginning to resound on the wooden bridge over the Betan-kura canal. Artamonov expected that the bridge would give way and that they would all perish in the still, cold, pitch-black water.

It was in fragmentary, nightmare-like pictures such as these, and among men driven mad by debauchery, that Artamonov sought for himself, and found a man he hardly knew—a man who was drinking himself to death and waiting with eagerness for some perfectly extraordinary event to happen the next moment, something very important and very delightful, which would either reduce one to unbounded despair or raise one up to a perpetual state of unbounded joy.

The most uncanny thing which remained like a dazzling spot upon his memory was a woman called Paula Menotti. He saw her in a large, empty, bare-walled room, a third of which was occupied by a table laden with bottles, different-coloured wine-glasses, vases of flowers and fruit, and little silver buckets of caviare and champagne. About a dozen men, red-haired, grey-haired, and bald-headed, were sitting impatiently at the table; and among the few empty chairs was one adorned with flowers.

Black-coated Styopa was standing in the middle of the room, holding up a gold-topped stick as if it were a candle.

"*Ei*, you swine!" he commanded. "Don't begin to eat yet."

"Shut up," said someone in a dull tone.

"Silence!" shouted the friend of humanity. "I am managing this!"

Then for some reason or other it suddenly got darker, and at the same time the dull beating of a drum made itself heard outside the door. Styopa strode towards the door and flung it open, and a big man came in, carrying a drum on his stomach. As he staggered along, he waddled like a goose and beat the drum violently:

"Boom, boom, boom! . . ."

He was followed by five other sedate and serious men, who were bending down and straining like horses in their efforts to drag a grand piano into the room by means of towels tied to its legs. On its gleaming black lid lay a naked woman—dazzlingly white and terrible to behold in her shameless nakedness. She lay on her back with her hands behind her head and her dark hair, which hung loose about her, merging into the black sheen of the varnish and growing out of the lid. The nearer she moved to the table, the more clearly did the shape of her body stand out. . . .

Amid the squeaking of little brass wheels, the creaking of the floor, and the resounding boom of the drum, the men who had harnessed themselves to this heavy chariot, came to a standstill and straightened their backs. Artamonov was waiting for everyone to burst out laughing—that would have



been more comprehensible—but instead they all stood up round the table and looked on in silence, while the woman lazily detached herself from the lid of the piano. It seemed as if she had only just awakened from sleep, and as if the lid beneath her were a fragment of night, congealed to the solidity of stone. It reminded one of a fairy story. Throwing her thick masses of hair behind her shoulders, she stood up and stamped her feet, dimming the deep sheen of the varnish with spots of white dust, and as she stamped one could hear the hum of the strings beneath her feet.

Two people came in: a grey-haired old woman in spectacles and a man in a frock-coat. The old woman sat down and displayed her yellow teeth and the black and white keys of the piano simultaneously. The man in the frock-coat raised a violin to his shoulder and, screwing up a red eye, took aim and made a cut across the instrument with his bow, and immediately the shrill piping voice of the violin broke in upon the bass chant of the piano strings. The naked woman drew herself up with a rippling movement, and with a toss of her head flung her hair over her breasts and hid them from sight. Then she began to sway to and fro, and to sing in a soft nasal drawl, which made her voice sound dreamy and far away.

Everyone gazed at her in silence, with their heads raised, their eyes unseeing, and the same expression on all their faces. She sang unwillingly, as if she were half asleep—her very bright lips framing unintelligible sounds, her languorous eyes gazing fixedly over people's heads. Artamonov had never imagined that a woman's body could be so slender or so alarmingly beautiful. As she went on passing her hands caressingly over her breasts and hips and shaking her head, it seemed as if her hair were growing, as if her whole body were becoming larger and more sumptuous, hiding everything else from view, until nothing was visible, nothing even existed, except herself. Artamonov remembered well that she had not aroused any desire in him to possess her even for a moment. The weird magic which radiated from her only inspired him with fear and made him depressingly shy.

He was getting sober and longing to escape unobserved, when he overheard a loud whisper which made him decide definitely to go.

"A *charusa*. A natural slough. Do you understand? A *charusa*."

He knew that a *charusa* was a grass plot in a swampy forest—a plot on which the grass was particularly silky and beautifully green—but that if you stepped on it, you fell into a bottomless bog. Nevertheless he went on gazing at the woman, chained to where he stood by the irresistible, compelling force of her nakedness. And whenever her heavy, languorous gaze fell upon him, he hunched up his shoulders and bent his neck forwards, casting a glance to one side which showed him that these monstrous, half-drunken men were staring at her with a look of dull astonishment in their eyes, just as the inhabitants of Dryomov had gazed at the house-painter who had fallen from the church roof and dashed his brains out.

Black, curly-haired Styepan was sitting on a window-sill, stroking his forehead with a trembling hand, and looking as if he were on the point of falling and striking his head on the floor. Then for some reason or other he tore his unfastened cuff off his shirt and flung it into a corner.

The woman's movements became more rapid and convulsive. She wriggled about as if she wanted to jump off the grand piano, but could not, and her strangled cries grew more nasal and more angry. But the weirdest thing of all was to see the undulating movements of her legs as they twisted round, the sharp jerks she gave to her head and the way her thick hair, which was flung over her shoulders like wings, fell over her breast and back like an animal's fleece.

Suddenly the music broke off. The woman jumped down on to the floor, and black-coated Styopa, after wrapping her up in a gold-coloured dressing-gown, ran off with her, while the others shouted, roared, clapped their hands and seized hold of one another. Waiters, all in white like dead men in winding-sheets, bustled round, wine and champagne glasses tinkled, and people began drinking as greedily as they do on

a sultry day. They ate and drank with unseemly voracity, and the sight of their heads bent over the table like pigs over a trough was almost revolting.

A crowd of gipsies appeared and danced and sang rousing songs. Then people started throwing cucumbers and table-napkins at them, and they disappeared. In their place Styopa drove in a noisy herd of women, one of whom, a plump little creature in a red dress, seated herself on Pyotr's knee and put a glass of champagne to his lips. Clinking her glass against his, she proposed a toast.

"Let us drink to the health of Mitya, Sandy!"

She was as light as a moth, and her name was Pashuta. She played the guitar very cleverly and sang:

"I dreamt of a morning clear and blue"

with touching effect. When she uttered the words:

"I dreamt of my youth that will never return,"

her resonant voice expressed such sorrow that Artamonov stroked her head in a friendly, fatherly way.

"Don't whimper," he said consolingly. "You are still young; don't be afraid. . . ."

But when he embraced her at night, he shut his eyes tight, so that he might see Paula Menotti better.

In his rare moments of sobriety he saw with great surprise that this lewd creature Pashuta was costing him a ridiculous amount of money.

"What a moth!" he thought to himself.

He was struck by the dexterity shown by these women in the fair in extorting money, and by the foolish way in which they wasted their earnings, won at the cost of nights spent in shame and drunkenness. He was told that the man with a face like a dog, who was a very big furrier, was spending tens of thousands upon Paula Menotti. Another man with purple ears, who put hundred-rouble notes into a candle to light his cigars from, used to slip bundles of credit-notes into the women's bosoms.

"Take them, you German, I have plenty," he would say.

He called all women Germans. Artamonov was beginning to discover the blatant immodesty of thick-haired Paula in each one of them. All women, he felt, with their stupidity and slyness, their deceit and impudence, were hostile to him. Even when he thought about his wife, he remembered there was an air of secret animosity about her.

"Moths," he thought to himself, and in imagination he contemplated a flower-bedecked band of beautiful young women in a dance, of whom his memory retained very bright and glowing impressions.

He could not understand how it was that men toiled and slaved at their work, and stunned their senses for the sole purpose of amassing as much money as possible, and then proceeded to burn their money and throw it in handfuls at the feet of dissolute women. And these were all respectable men in big positions, men who had wives and children and were owners of vast factories.

"Father would have erred in the same way, I suppose," he thought almost confidently. He did not see himself as a participant in this life of revelry, but merely as a casual and unwilling spectator. Still his thoughts about it intoxicated him more powerfully than wine, and it was only in wine that he found it possible to drown them. Accordingly he spent three weeks in a nightmare of revelry, and only recovered his senses upon the arrival of Alexei.

Artamonov was lying on a thin, hard mattress on the floor, with a pail of ice, some bottles of kvass and a plate of sauerkraut, plentifully flavoured with grated horse-radish, standing beside him. Pashuta was sprawling on a sofa. Her mouth was open, her eyebrows were raised like Natalya's, and one white leg with blue veins on it, ending up in a foot with toenails like the scales of a fish, was hanging down on to the floor. Outside the window the roar of the All-Russian market rose up from thousands of ravenous jaws.

Through the drunken buzzing in his head and the ache of his poisoned body, Artamonov gloomily recalled the events and amusements of the previous night, when Alexei had

appeared as suddenly as if he had burst through the wall. Now he came up to him, limping, and tapping his stick on the floor.

"What are you doing on the floor?" he burst out. "Yesterday I was looking for you all day and all night, but towards morning I joined in the revels myself."

He immediately called a waiter and ordered lemonade, brandy and ice. Then he sprang towards the sofa and gave Pashuta a slap on the shoulder.

"Get up, young lady!"

But the young lady did not open her eyes at once, and merely muttered:

"Go to the devil! Leave me alone."

"It's you who will go to the devil," said Alexei good-temperedly, and lifting her by her shoulders, he set her up and gave her a shake.

"Shoo!" he said, pointing to the door.

"Don't touch her," said Pyotr. Alexei smiled and soothed him.

"It doesn't matter. We have only to call her and she'll come!"

"Oh damn!" said the woman, submissively putting on her blouse. Alexei was giving orders like a doctor:

"Get up, Pyotr. Take off your shirt and rub yourself with ice!"

Picking up her crushed hat from the floor, Pashuta proceeded to put it on her tousled head.

"A very beautiful queen!" she said, glancing at the looking-glass over the sofa, and flinging her hat on the ground under the sofa, she gave a long yawn.

"Well, good-bye, Mitya! Remember I am in Simanski's lodging-house. Room No. 13."

Pyotr felt sorry for her.

"Give her something," he said to Alexei, without getting up from the floor.

"How much?"

"Well . . . fifty roubles."

"Eh! That's a lot."

Alexei thrust a note into her hand, and having seen her off, carefully shut the door.

"That was a miserly present," challenged Pyotr. "She paid more than that for her hat yesterday."

Alexei sat down in an arm-chair, clasped his hands over his stick and leant his chin on them.

"What are you doing?" he asked in a cold superior tone.

"I am drinking," answered his elder brother quarrelsomely, and getting up, he began rubbing his body with ice and grunting to himself.

"Drink away, Ted, but don't lose your head! And what are you doing here?"

"What's that to you?"

Alexei went near and looked at him as he would have looked at a stranger.

"Have you forgotten?" he hissed in a low voice. "A complaint has been made against you for striking a barrister in the face and pushing a policeman into the canal. . . ."

The list of offences he enumerated was so long that Artamonov thought he was lying and trying to frighten him.

"What barrister do you mean? It's nonsense."

"It's not nonsense. Don't you remember the man in black? What's his name?"

"I had a fight with him before that," said Pyotr, who was growing sober. But Alexei continued still more severely.

"And why did you insult respectable people? And your own family?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. You abused your wife, Tikhon and me. You referred to some boy or other, and cried. And you kept shouting: 'Abraham, Isaac, the ram!' What does it all mean?"

Fear clutched at Pyotr's heart and he sank down on a chair.

"I don't know. I was drunk."

"That's not the reason!" Alexei almost screamed, bobbing up and down as if he were riding a lame horse. "There is something else. 'What a sober man has in his mind, a drunken man has on his tongue'—that's what it is. One does not shout out one's family affairs in public-houses. Why talk of

Abraham and a sacrifice and other rubbish ? You are bringing disgrace upon the business, don't you see, and casting a slur upon me. Why did you undress as if you were in the bath-house ? It was a good thing that my friend Loktyev was present at this exhibition and had the sense to make you dead-drunk on brandy and to summon me here by telegram. It was he who told me all this. At first, he said, everybody laughed, but afterwards they began to listen to what you were jabbering about."

"Everybody jabbars," muttered Pyotr in a subdued tone, becoming intoxicated again at the sound of Alexei's words.

"Everybody jabbars about one thing, but you jabbered about everything. It is a good thing that Loktyev hit on the idea of making everyone senselessly drunk. Perhaps they will forget. But then, you know, our business is a matter of politics. To-day Loktyev is our friend, but to-morrow he may be a violent enemy."

Pyotr was sitting on a chair, pressing the back of his head firmly against the wall. The streets were drowned in violent noise, and the wall was quivering. Pyotr said nothing, while he waited for the quiver of the wall to clear his fuddled head and banish his fears. He could not remember any of the things Alexei had talked about. Besides which it was very mortifying to hear his brother speaking in the tone of a judge and an elder man, and it was with an uneasy feeling that he waited to hear what more he had to say.

"What happened to you ?" he inquired, bobbing up and down all the time. "You said you were going to see Nikita."

"I did go and see him."

"So did I. When a reply came in answer to my telegram, that you weren't there, of course I rushed off at once. We were all alarmed, for while we are in this world there is always a chance of being killed."

"I must have got some absurd idea into my head," confessed Pyotr in a quiet, apologetic tone.

"But ought you to have divulged it to other people ? You must realize that you are casting a slur upon the business. What sacrifices have you made for it ?"

Pyotr smoothed the hair on his head and chin with both hands and said through his fingers :

"Ilya . . . it was all because of him. . . ."

Slowly and hesitatingly, as if he were groping his way along a footpath in the dark, he began telling Alexei the story of his quarrel with Ilya. But he did not have to talk for long, because his brother was soon loudly expressing his relief.

"Pooh! That's nothing! Loktyev thought it was something scandalous. So it was Ilya you were referring to? Well, my friend, you must forgive me. Only this sort of thing is not wise. Merchants must learn all there is to be learnt and rise to every crisis in life, but you . . ."

He talked eloquently and at great length about the necessity of merchants' children becoming engineers, civil servants and army officers. A deafening noise came through the window. Carriages were being driven up to the theatre, vendors of cooling drinks and ices were calling out their wares and, most intolerable of all, came the crash of music from the Pavilion, a construction of iron and glass, built by some Brazilians on piles over the water of the canal. The beating of a drum recalled memories of Paula Menotti.

"I must have got some absurd idea into my head," repeated the elder Artamonov, feeling his ear with one hand and pouring some brandy into a glass of lemonade with the other. Alexei took the bottle from his hand.

"Take care; you will get drunk again," he warned him. "There is my Miron, now. He is learning to be an engineer, the wretch! He wants to go abroad, if you please. But we want all our young men at home, not abroad. You must realize that our class in society is the chief strength of the country."

Pyotr did not want to understand anything. While his brother was carrying on this animated conversation, he was thinking to himself :

"Here is a man who by some means has gained the respect and friendship of men who are richer and probably cleverer than himself, and who extend their businesses all over the country. My other brother has hidden himself away in a



monastery and is winning renown as a wise and saintly man. And here am I condemned to be torn in pieces by some whim of chance. Why is it? What is the object of it?"

"To say you abused respectable people because you were dissipated is useless!" said Alexei, whose tone was already a little gentler and more ingratiating. "It was not dissipation which made you abusive, but superfluous energy. The lawyer is a scamp, but he knows very well that he is clever! Of course elderly people and even quite old men can be insolent, but then their insolence is like the insolence of boys, and surely it is their growing vigour that makes boys insolent. You must also take into account the fact that our women are uninteresting. There is no pepper in them and they are dull company. I am not talking of Olga because she is an exception. And there are also foolish wise-women who are apparently blind in the eye which sees any evil. Olga is one of them. It is impossible to offend her, because she doesn't see what is evil and doesn't believe in wickedness. You can't say that about Natalya, but you were right when you told people that she was 'a household machine'!"

"Did I really say so?" inquired Pyotr crossly.

"Loktyev did not invent it himself."

He wanted to ask Alexei a great deal more, but feared to remind him of what he had, perhaps, already forgotten. And a feeling of envy and hatred against his brother arose within him.

"He is getting cleverer every day, the devil!"

He saw there was a forced briskness, a fox-like resourcefulness about Alexei. He was irritated by his hawk-like eyes, the gold tooth which gleamed behind his twitching upper lip, his grey moustache turned up in military fashion, his gay little beard, and his clutching, claw-like fingers. Particularly did he dislike the first finger of his right hand, which was always drawing some ingenious figure in the air. And he thought that his short steel-grey pea-jacket made him look like some rascally attorney.

He felt a sudden longing for Alexei to go away.

"I must sleep for a little," he said, closing his eyes.

"That's sensible of you," agreed Alexei. "Don't go anywhere to-day."

"He lectures me as if I were a little boy," thought Pyotr with annoyance, as he saw him off. He went to the wash-hand-stand in the corner and stood still, for moving noiselessly by his side he had caught sight of a man like himself. He was miserably dishevelled, his face was battered, his eyes were starting out of his head with fright, and as he moved along, he was stroking his wet beard and hairy chest. It was several seconds before he could convince himself that it was his own reflection in the looking-glass above the sofa. Then with a doleful smile, he proceeded once more to rub his face, neck and chest with a lump of ice.

"I'll engage a coachman and go for a drive in the town," he decided as he dressed himself, but no sooner had he put his arm into the sleeve of his pea-jacket than he threw it on the chair and pressed the bone bell-knob with a firm finger.

"Some tea. Make it strong!" he said to the waiter. "And let me have something salty and some brandy."

From the window he saw that the wide shop-doors were already shut. People were creeping about the street, their figures flattened against the cobble-stones in the warm darkness. An opal lamp was spluttering at the entrance of a theatre, and some women were singing somewhere near.

"Moths!" he thought.

"Can I tidy the room?" said someone behind him, and he turned round abruptly to find a one-eyed old woman standing at the door, holding a broom and some rags in her hands. He went out into the passage without a word and bumped into a man wearing dark spectacles and a black hat, who said through the crack of a half-open door:

"Yes, yes, that will do!"

It was all unpleasant, and forced him to think and to search for some hidden meaning in what he had heard. Afterwards when he was sitting at a round table with a little samovar singing in front of him, the glass of the lamp above his head kept ringing, as if it were being touched lightly by some invisible hand. Through his memory flashed strange figures

of men maddened by drink, the words of songs, snatches of his brother's authoritative harangue, and the flashing glances of eyes which had caught his notice as he passed them by. Nevertheless all was void and dark in his brain except for one thin trembling beam of light which seemed to have penetrated it, and in which people were dancing and whirling round like particles of dust, preventing him from thinking about anything very important.

He was drinking hot strong tea and taking gulps of brandy, and though it burnt his mouth he was not aware of getting drunk. All he was conscious of was a growing sense of restlessness. He wanted to go elsewhere. He rang the bell and there appeared a nebulous, undulating creature without a face or hair, who looked like a walking-stick with a bone top.

"Bring me some green liqueur, Vanka. Green, do you know it?"

"Perfectly. You mean Chartreuse."

"Are you Vanka?"

"No, I'm Konstantin."

"Well, go along."

When the waiter brought the liqueur, Artamonov asked:

"Are you a soldier?"

"No, I'm not."

"You speak like a soldier."

"My duty is similar. I have to obey orders."

After a little reflection, Artamonov gave him a rouble.

"Don't obey orders," he advised. "Let everyone go to . . . and you sell ices. That's all!"

The liqueur, which was as sticky as treacle and as pungent as spirits of ammonia, made him feel lighter and clearer in the head, and somehow pulled his faculties together. While this process was going on in his head, the bustle in the street was growing quieter and more subdued also, and what little noise there was floated away in the distance, leaving peace and quiet behind it.

"Ought one to obey?" reflected Artamonov. "And if so, whom? I am a master, not a waiter. Am I a master or not?"

But all these reflections were suddenly interrupted and put to flight by fear. He suddenly saw before him the man who was preventing him from leading the easy, graceful existence led by Alexei and other gay people. He was a broad-faced man with a beard, and he was sitting silently on the opposite side of the samovar, with his beard clutched in the fingers of his left hand, and his cheek resting on his hand. He was gazing sadly at Pyotr Artamonov as if he were saying good-bye, and as if he felt half sorry for him, half reproachful. As he gazed, he wept, and bitter tears were streaming down from beneath his red eyelids. A large fly was crawling about on the edge of his beard near his left eye. Now it had crawled across on to his temple—just as if his face belonged to a dead man—and there it remained above his eyebrow, peeping into his eyes.

"Who are you, you scoundrel?" Artamonov asked his enemy. The latter made no movement, no reply. He merely moved his lips.

"What are you crying for?" roared Pyotr Artamonov malevolently. "You have got me into difficulties, so you are crying about it. You are sorry for me now, are you?"

Snatching a bottle from the table, he struck the man with all his force on his bald head.

The crash of the shattered looking-glass and the clatter of the samovar and the tea-things, which had fallen to the ground when the table upset, brought people on the scene. There were not many of them, but they each split into two and separated, and the old woman with one eye appeared at one and the same moment to be bending down to pick up the samovar and standing up straight.

As he sat on the floor, Artamonov heard the sound of plaintive voices:

"It is night and everyone is asleep!"

"The looking-glass has been smashed!"

"It isn't the way to behave, you know!"

Artamonov was floating in space with his arms outspread.

"The fly . . ." he bellowed.

Towards evening on the next day Alexei trotted in, looking

as anxious as a doctor about his patient, or a coachman about his horse. Having examined his brother, he ran a little brush over his moustache and said :

"You are unnaturally bloated. You can't possibly appear like this at home. Besides, you may be a help to me here. You ought to trim your beard, Pyotr, and buy yourself another pair of boots. The ones you wear are coachman's boots ! "

Tightening his jaw, Artamonov humbly followed him to a hairdresser's, and Alexei explained exactly how much his beard and hair were to be cut. At the boot shop Alexei chose a pair of boots for him, after which Pyotr found on glancing at a looking-glass, that he resembled a shopman. He also discovered that his boots were pinching his instep, but recognizing that Alexei was doing the right thing, he said nothing. Having his hair cut and changing his boots, he knew, was very necessary. And, generally speaking, it was necessary to get himself in order and forget the blurred, suffocating sensation, which was the result of his drunken bout and which weighed upon him heavily.

But in spite of the fog which clouded his brain and the weariness which assailed his poisoned and exhausted body, he experienced, as he watched Alexei, a more and more complex sensation, which was a mixture of envy, respect, secret contempt, and animosity. This lean, brisk, keen-eyed man, who always had a little stick in his hand, was consumed with insatiable greed for play, just as he was for work. As they breakfasted and dined in private rooms in the best inns of the fair, in company with well-known merchants, Pyotr saw, to his no small astonishment, that Alexei was playing the fool and trying to keep rich men amused. And though they did not seem to take any notice of his buffoonery, they evidently liked and respected him, and listened attentively while he chattered like a magpie.

A textile manufacturer called Komolov, an enormous man with a close-cropped beard, would raise a threatening finger the colour of a carrot, but would speak kindly.

"You are a clever man, Olyosha !" he would say, rolling

his ox-like eyes and giving a succulent smack with his lips. "You are cunning, you fox! You have outwitted me. . . ."

"Yermolai Ivanovich!" Alexei would shout enthusiastically. "That's competition, isn't it?"

"True, keep your eyes open. Play your ace of trumps!"

"I am learning to do so, Yermolai Ivanovich!"

"Yes, one must learn," agreed Komolov.

"Gentlemen!" Alexei's voice was just as enthusiastic, but more insinuating than before, and he was waving a fork in the air. "My son Miron, who is an intelligent lad and is going to be an engineer, has often told me the story of a famous philosopher who lived in the town of Syracuse. He used to say to the king: 'Give me something to stand upon and I will turn the whole earth round for you!'"

"*Isb*, you grey-belly!"

"'I'll turn the earth round,' he said! Gentlemen! Our class has something to stand on—the rouble. We don't want any wise men to turn the earth round. We can do it for ourselves with our moustaches. We only need one thing, and that is a different sort of government official! Gentlemen! The nobility are declining, they are no obstacle to us. But we must have government officials of our own class. All the men we need must be merchants, who can understand our business. That's what we want!"

The stout, grey-haired, bald-headed men cheerfully agreed.

"That's true, grey-belly!"

And Losyev the bill-broker, a skinny old man with one eye and a sharp-pointed nose, said with a polite titter:

"Alexei Ilyich's little brain is like a mouse. It knows all about everything. It knows where the fat is, and nibbles and nibbles away at it, even where there is only a little! Here's to his health!"

They raised their glasses, and Alexei clinked his against everyone's, and Losyev, who was patting Komolov's round shoulder with a little hand no bigger than a child's, said:

"There are some clever men rising up amongst us."

"There always have been!" replied Komolov proudly.

"My father, who was a stevedore, became a . . ."

"Your father founded his fortune, they say, by cutting the throat of a rich Armenian," said Losyev with a smile, at which the textile manufacturer with the close-cropped beard bellowed with laughter like a ram.

"What tittle-tattle!" he replied. "People are so stupid that they say: if a man is fortunate, he must be wicked! There are some unpleasant rumours afloat even about you, Kuzma."

"Yes, even about me," repeated Losyev with a sigh. "Rumours are like flies, *ekb!*"

Artamonov listened and gave little grunts, ate a great deal, and tried to drink less. Among these men he felt with some despondency that he was like an animal of another species. He knew they were all peasants of yesterday. He saw they all had something of the robber about them, some romantic quality which inspired respect, and which they had in common with his father. His father of course would have been with them both in business and in merry-making. He would probably have gone in for the same dissipations and would have burnt his money like wood-shavings. Yes, money was merely a wood-shaving to men like these, who were engaged so indefatigably, so whole-heartedly in planing down the world, one another, and the country-side.

But Alexei was somehow unlike these great men, and now and then, in spite of his dislike, Pyotr felt that his brother was shrewder and more intelligent than they, and even more dangerous.

"Gentlemen!" he would shout with the ecstasy of a man possessed. "Consider the inexhaustible strength of our arms, and the millions upon millions of peasants! The peasants are both our workmen and our customers. Where else can they be found in such numbers? Nowhere! We don't need any Germans, any foreigners. We can keep everything to ourselves!"

"That's true!" the drunken men would bawl in chorus.

He spoke of the urgent need of putting a tax on the importation of foreign goods, of buying up the property of the land-owners, and of the harm done by the banks belonging to the

nobility. He knew about everything, and to Artamonov's astonishment the others agreed enthusiastically with whatever he said.

"Nikita was right when he said that Alexei knew how to get on," he thought enviously.

In spite of his delicate health, Alexei was a libertine and had apparently had a permanent mistress for a long time. She was a Moscow woman who kept a choir of women singers, a stout, massive creature with a brazen voice and radiant eyes. She was said to be over forty, but to judge by her face, which was dead white with a red flush under the skin, she was not even thirty.

"Alyoshinka, my falcon!" she would say, displaying her pointed fox-like teeth, and she would embrace him as a mother her child.

She must have known, and of course could not help seeing, that Alexei did not dislike the girls in her choir either. Still she remained on friendly terms with him, and more than once Pyotr heard him asking her advice about people and things, a fact which caused him surprise and reminded him of his father and Ulyana Baimakova.

"He is a devil!" he thought, as he looked at him.

Even his mischief was unusually ingenious in character. A big German clown called Meier was showing off a pig in the circus. Dressed in a long frock-coat, a top-hat, and little boots like bottles, it walked about on its hind legs and gave a representation of a merchant. This caused great amusement among the audience and even the merchants laughed, but Alexei adopted a different attitude. Instead of laughing, he took offence and persuaded a group of his friends to steal the pig. Having bribed its groom, they stole the pig, and the merchants triumphantly ate its meat cooked in a variety of sauces by the very expert cook at the Hotel Barbatyenko. Pyotr Artamonov heard a vague report that the clown had hanged himself from grief.<sup>1</sup> In fact everything that he noticed about Alexei at the fair caused him much anxious thought.

<sup>1</sup> This incident, described by P. D. Boborikin in a newspaper called *The Russian Courier*, took place in 1880.



"He is a swindler. He has no conscience. He'll ruin me one day without ever even noticing it. And he won't do it out of avarice, but simply for fun."

It was this consciousness of danger which sobered him and set him on his legs. He was returning home alone, Alexei having gone on to Moscow, and by the time he approached Dryomov it was September and the weather was wet and windy. The post-horses were tinkling their little bells and their hoofs were striking the tired ground with the sound of smacking kisses, as they trotted briskly through a small pine-wood, which kept the narrow strip of swampy road immovably fixed between its rigid rows of trees. The whole sky was plastered over with a paste of grey clouds, as dull and as grey as the interior of Artamonov's fuddled head. He felt as if he had been to the funeral of someone very near to him, of whom he was nevertheless heartily tired. And though he was sorry for the dead man, it was pleasant to realize that he would not meet him any more, or ever again be disturbed by his obscure requests, his dumb reproaches, and all his other demands which prevented him, Pyotr Artamonov, from leading the life of a real, living being.

"One must do one's work, that and nothing else!" he went on assuring himself. "Everyone lives on work."

He set to work with all his might, and the bright days of late summer passed peacefully by, alternating with the mournful radiance of moonlit nights.

As soon as he woke up in the pearly darkness of dawn on these autumn mornings, he heard the peremptory scream of the factory; and half an hour later its tumultuous rustle and whisper had begun, and his ear was filled with the usual dull but forcible sounds of labour. From dawn until late at night men and women were shouting in the storerooms as they delivered their consignments of flax, and from the inn on the bank of the Vataraksha, which had been opened by one of the innumerable Morozovs, came the sound of drunken songs and the scream of a concertina. Tikhon Vyalov walked stolidly about the yard, carrying a broom, a spade and an axe, as punctual as a machine himself and correspondingly severe in his treat-

ment of others. Seraphim, as clean as ever in his pale blue clothes, appeared and disappeared. And in the house Natalya too worked like a machine, well pleased with the rich presents her husband had brought her from the fair, and still better pleased at his silent and unruffled calm. Everything went smoothly, and seemed to be settled for good—the factory, the factory-hands, and even the horses, all worked as if they meant to go on for ever. And the months floated swiftly by, like clouds driven before the wind, and year was added to year.

Artamonov went about the factory buildings and the courtyard with his head bent down like a bull, and frightened the little children as he strode along the village street, conscious wherever he went of the strange and novel fact that his presence in this great business was as superfluous as a spectator's. It was good to see that Yakov understood the business and was apparently attracted by it, and the boy's behaviour not only distracted his thoughts from, but even reconciled him to, Ilya.

"Study away. I can do without you and your learning!" he thought.

Yakov was plump and rosy-cheeked and had nice eyes, which reflected every colour like a soap bubble when he smiled. He carried his roundness sedately, and though at a near view he was strangely like a pigeon, in the distance he seemed a clever, business-like factory-owner. The workwomen would cast affectionate smiles at him, and he would coo back at them with a delightful twinkle in his eyes, and walk round them sideways, unable to conceal the excitement of youth beneath his veneer of sedateness. Pyotr would pull his ear and think with a smile:

"I wish I could show you Paula, you little fool!"

He was pleased to see that when Yakov stayed with his uncle, he took no part in the endless arguments which went on between Miron and his tiresome, battered-looking friend Goritsvyetov. Miron had grown entirely unlike a merchant's son. With his spare build, his large nose, his spectacles, and his jacket with its gilt buttons and some sort of monogram

on the shoulders, he reminded one of a justice of the peace. He held himself as erect as a soldier, whether he was walking or sitting, and had a supercilious and arrogant way of talking; and although Pyotr realized that everything he said was clever he nevertheless disliked him.

"Come now—my friend, this is foolosophy," Miron would say didactically, holding his arms a-kimbo and thrusting his hands into the pockets of his jacket. "This philosophizing is the result of foolishness and ignorance."

In Artamonov's opinion even Goritsvyetov seemed to talk sense. He was small, and his black shirt and the student's coat he wore over it were untidy, unbuttoned and ragged. His puffy eyes made him look as if he had not slept for several days, and his face was pointed, dark-complexioned and covered with pimples. He talked at the top of his voice with his arms waving convulsively in the air, and refused to listen to anyone else and was always ready to pounce down on Miron.

"You will reach the point when the sun will rise in the sky at the whistle of your factories, when the smoky daylight will creep up out of the marshes and the forests at the call of your machinery, but what will you do with man?"

Miron would raise his eyebrows and wrinkle up his forehead.

"That is foolosophy. That is poetry!" he would impress upon his friend, as he straightened his spectacles. "A quibble, a sophism, my friend! Life is a struggle, and lyric poetry and hysteria have no place in it. In fact, they are ridiculous."

The discussion between these two stood out from the rest of the conversation as conspicuously as white pigeons among blue ones.

"Yes, that's it," thought Artamonov. "They are new birds, so they sing new songs."

He only dimly understood the main theme of their arguments, and as he watched Yakov he saw to his satisfaction that he was smoothing the light down on his upper lip in an attempt to hide a derisive smile.

"I see," he thought. "I wonder what Ilya would have said!"

"When you have bound the world and mankind in iron

bonds," shouted Goritsvyetov, "when you have made humanity the slave of a machine. . . ."

"Humanity, whom you are worrying about, are idlers," said Miron with a shake of his head. "They will all perish, unless they understand by to-morrow that their welfare is bound up with the development of industry."

"Which of them is right? Which is the better of the two?" conjectured Artamonov.

He did not like Goritsvyetov any more than he liked his nephew. There was something weak and feeble about him, and he was obviously timid and blustering. His behaviour was as unceremonious as a drunkard's. He always took his seat at the dinner table before the heads of the household, clutched at the knives and forks and moved them from one place to another, ate with unseemly haste and then burnt his mouth and coughed. Like Alexei he was too high-spirited and, apparently, malicious, and his inflamed eyes looked out blindly from their dark pupils. He said nothing when he met Pyotr Artamonov, but merely stuck out a hot rough hand disrespectfully and quickly drew it back again. Taking him all round, he was a useless fellow, and one could not imagine why he was Miron's friend.

"Eat, Styopa, and don't talk," Olga would say admonishingly.

"I can't eat," he would reply, in a voice which sounded as if he were bursting. "Such pernicious heresy is preached here."

Pyotr was astonished at the silent attention with which Alexei listened to the student's arguments. Only very occasionally did he come to the support of his son.

"That's right!" he would say. "Where there is strength, there is power, and since there is strength in industry, it means that. . . ."

After tea and dinner Olga, who had little wrinkles radiating across her temples and a red tip to her nose, caused by the weight of her thick rimless spectacles, would sit at her embroidery frame near the window, and without uttering a word, continue with ceaseless diligence to embroider her beads in

unusually bright colours. Pyotr felt more comfortable in his brother's house than at home. It was more interesting and there was always good wine to drink.

"Did you understand what they were arguing about?" he would ask Yakov on the way home.

"Yes, I did," Yakov would reply briefly.

In order to hide the fact that he had not understood him, self, Artamonov would question him closely:

"What was it then?"

Yakov's reply was always brief and unwilling, but intelligible. According to his account, Miron had been maintaining that Russia must follow the same course as the whole of Europe had done, but Goritsvyetov believed that Russia should go her own way. At this point Artamonov thought it necessary to show his son that he too had ideas on the subject.

"If foreigners were really better off than we are," he said insinuatingly, "they would not try to come into our country."

But this was Alexei's idea. None of his own appeared to be forthcoming, and he frowned in mortification. Yakov apparently made things much worse by saying:

"It is quite possible to live comfortably without boasting about one's brain power, or having these discussions."

"Yes, it is," roared Artamonov.

He was experiencing more and more frequently the shocks of little rebuffs and surprises, which kept pushing him to one side and forcing him to play the part of a spectator who has to see everything and think about everything. All his surroundings were going through an imperceptible but rapid change, and on every hand a new spirit of unrest was asserting itself both in word and deed. One day Olga said at tea:

"You have found the truth, when your heart is full and you have nothing more to wish for."

"That is true," agreed Pyotr.

But Miron flashed his spectacles upon his mother and began lecturing her.

"That is not truth. That is death. Truth is to be found in work, in activity."

When he had gone out, taking with him a thick sheet of paper rolled up in the shape of a trumpet, Pyotr remarked to Olga :

“Your son is rude to you.”

“He isn’t in the least.”

“But I can see he is ! ”

“He is more intelligent than I am,” said Olga. “I am not educated, you see, and so I often say stupid things. Children are generally more intelligent than their parents.”

Artamonov could not believe this, and he replied with a smile :

“You are right. You do say stupid things. But, you know, old people, wiser than ourselves, have said : ‘Sons bring you one sorrow, daughters bring you two.’ Do you understand ? ”

He was very irritated by her remark about the intelligence of one’s children. Of course she wanted to give him a hint about Ilya. He knew that Alexei was helping him with money and that Miron was writing letters to him, but he was too proud himself ever to inquire where the boy was and how he was getting on. Olga, understanding his pride, would dexterously introduce some information about Ilya into other topics of conversation, and it was through her he had discovered that his son had gone to live at Archangel for some reason or other, and that he was now living abroad.

“Well, let him live there,” he thought. “He will grow wiser and realize that he has been stupid.”

Sometimes when he thought about Ilya, he was astonished at his obstinacy. Everyone else round him was growing wiser. What could Ilya be waiting for ?

At Alexei’s house he often met Vera Popova and her daughter, the former as beautiful as ever, with the same mournful calm and the same aloofness. She never said much to him, and then only the sort of things he had once been in the habit of saying to Ilya, when he thought he had hurt the boy’s feelings for no reason. She always made him feel shy. In quiet moments her image would rise before him, but the only feeling it aroused in him was astonishment : here is a creature

you are fond of, he would say to himself, and who occupies your thoughts, yet you can't understand why you want her, and talking to her is as impossible as talking to a deaf-mute.

Yes, everything was changing. Even the workmen were becoming more capricious, ill-tempered and consumptive, and the women more and more shrewish. The noise in the workpeople's village was more disquieting now, and in the evening it seemed as if the whole place were full of howling wolves or the angry rumble of choked-up sand.

A spirit of restlessness and a passion for vagrancy was becoming noticeable among the workpeople, and young men who had nothing whatever to complain of would suddenly arrive at the office and give notice.

"Where are you going?" Pyotr would inquire.

"To see what's going on in other places."

"What is driving them all mad?" Artamonov kept asking his brother.

Alexei would make a foxy little grimace and tell him with a laugh that workmen were getting restless everywhere.

"It is quiet enough here still, but in St. Petersburg . . . Our government officials and ministers are not the men we want."

And he went on talking in such a rash and stupid way that his elder brother lectured him severely:

"That's nonsense! It's the gentry who have something to gain by taking the Tsar's power away, because they are getting poorer. But we are getting richer, even though we haven't any power. Your father used to go about even on holidays in tarred boots, but you wear elegant foreign boots and silk ties. It's our duty to be the Tsar's workmen, not his pigs. The Tsar is an oak tree. It is from him we get golden acorns."

Alexei listened with a smile on his face, which exasperated Artamonov still more. He discovered that, generally speaking, people laughed much too often, a new habit, which was both dull and stupid. No one, however, could make such comforting and amusing jokes as that immortal old man Seraphim the carpenter.

Artamonov made great friends with the Comforter. From time to time a sense of utter boredom would descend upon him, filling him with an overpowering desire to drink. He was ashamed of getting drunk at his brother's house, because strangers were always dropping in, and he particularly did not want to appear drunk in front of Vera Popova. At home, on these occasions, Natalya bent her head mournfully and maintained an oppressive silence. It would have been better if she had scolded him, then he could have scolded her in return. But she was just like a woman who has been robbed, and instead of anger she roused a feeling akin to pity. So Artamonov would go to Seraphim.

"I want to drink, old man."

"That's a very usual thing," the merry carpenter would say with a smile of approval, "just like sunshine in summer! It means you are tired and worn out. Well, well, pull yourself together! Your business isn't a small thing like a wart on one's cheek!"

He kept a particular brand of liqueur for his master, for the making of which he brought out different-coloured bottles from every corner of the room.

"It's my own invention," he would boast. "There's only one woman who makes it, a deacon's widow, and she knows what's what! Here you are, have a taste. It is an infusion of birch catkins mixed with spring sap. What do you think of it?"

Seating himself at the table, he would drink his "turnip" wine and babble on:

"Yes, that's the sort of woman the deacon's widow is! A most unfortunate woman! The man who is not her lover is a thief. She can't live without lovers."

"I saw a woman like that at the fair," Artamonov would remark reminiscently.

"Of course," Seraphim would agree hastily. "You find all the choicest wares in the world there. I know!"

Seraphim knew everything about everybody. He told interesting stories about the family affairs of the staff and the workpeople, mentioning them all in the same tone of affection.



Of his daughter, however, he spoke as though she were a stranger.

"The rascal has sobered down now. She is living with Syedov the locksmith and is doing well, mark you! Yes, every creature finds its own little niche."

It was good to be with Seraphim in his clean little room filled with the resinous smell of wood-shavings, and to sit in the warm half-darkness dimly illuminated by the modest light of the tin lamp upon the wall.

As soon as Artamonov had had something to drink, he began complaining against people, but the carpenter comforted him.

"That's nothing, that's all right! The men keep running away, that's your chief difficulty. A fellow lies thinking and thinking till at last he gets up and goes off. Well, let him go! Don't be annoyed. You must believe in human nature. You believe in yourself, don't you?"

While Pyotr Artamonov considered in silence whether he believed in himself or not, Seraphim's brisk little voice went on in a consoling sing-song:

"You must not look to see who is good and who is bad. That's no use. What was good yesterday may be bad to-day. I have seen all there is to see both of good and evil, Pyotr Ilyich. *Okh*, I have seen a lot! I have seen a thing in the old days and said: 'Here is something good.' But now it is gone. I have said: 'Here's a good man!' But later on he too has been swept away like dust before the wind. And here am I! What am I, do you suppose? A fly. I am not even visible amongst other people. And there's yourself. . . ."

Seraphim raised a finger significantly and said no more.

Artamonov derived a double pleasure from listening to his talk, for it gave him real comfort as well as amusement. But at the same time he saw quite plainly that the little old man was playing a game and telling lies, for he did not mean what he said, but was merely speaking as a professional comforter.

"The rascally old man!" he thought, realizing the game he was playing. "He is clever! Nikita can't do that."

And he thought of all the different comforters he had ever

seen: the shameless women at the fair, clowns and acrobats at the circus, jugglers, tamers of wild animals, singers, musicians, and black-coated Styopa "the friend of humanity." His brother Alexei had also something in common with these people, but Tikhon Vyalov had nothing. Nor had Paula Menotti.

"You are lying, you old devil!" he said to Seraphim drunkenly.

The carpenter slapped his pointed knees and spoke very seriously:

"No, I'm not. Consider now. How can I possibly lie if I don't know the truth? I tell you in all sincerity that I don't know the truth. Therefore how can I be lying?"

"Then be silent!"

"But I am not dumb, am I?" Seraphim would ask affectionately, his little pink face lighting up with a smile. "I'm an old man," he would say. "I am living out the little time I have left without knowledge of the truth. It is the business of young men to strive after the truth. That's what they have spectacles for. Miron Lexeich walks about in spectacles, so that he can see through everything and know the why and wherefore of things and the whereabouts of every one."

It was a satisfaction to Artamonov to know that the carpenter did not like Miron, and he roared with laughter when the old man sang a song at his expense, strumming at the same time on the strings of the psaltery:

"Hopping about in a factory,  
A woodpecker, with a wise bright eye,  
Inspects the works: 'Absurd!' says he,  
'What fools they are compared with me!'"

"True!" said Artamonov approvingly.

And stamping his foot in strict time with the music, the carpenter, who was also rather drunk, sang once more:

"It is not hawk nor owl  
Whose beak the birds doth prod—  
It is Alexei Ilyich  
The little saint of God!"

Artamonov was delighted at this too. Then Seraphim quite brazenly sang a song about Yakov :

“ See how Yasha  
Clasps his Masha,  
All unknowing  
What he’s doing ! ”

In this way they sometimes amused themselves till dawn, after which Tikhon Vyalov knocked at the door and woke his master up, if he had already gone to sleep.

“ It is time to go home ! ” he would say unconcernedly. “ The whistle will be sounding directly, and the workpeople will see you—which is not a good thing ! ”

“ What isn’t a good thing ? ” Artamonov would shout. “ I’m master here ! ”

Still he would obey the *dvornik* and go heavily off to bed, tottering a little as he walked. Sometimes he would sleep until the evening, but the night would find him with Seraphim once more.

The light-hearted carpenter died at his work. The son of Morozov, the one-eyed assistant-doctor, had been drowned, and Seraphim was making his coffin, when he suddenly fell down dead. Wishing to follow the old man to his grave, Artamonov went to the church, which was packed with factory hands, and listened to the red-haired priest Alexandr sternly conducting the service. The latter had taken the place of the quiet Glyeb, who for some reason had suddenly given up being a priest and gone no one knew where. The choir, formed by Gryekov, a man like a tom-cat who taught in the factory school, sang beautifully in church, and there were a great many young people present.

“ That’s because it’s Sunday,” said Artamonov to himself, trying to account for the number of people.

The light little coffin was carried by young weavers—the more sedate among the workmen keeping in the background—and behind the coffin, frowning but tearless, walked Zinaïda, dressed in a bright-coloured blouse unbecoming to the occasion. Next to her walked broad-shouldered Syedov the lock-

smith, dressed in clean clothes, and Tikhon Vyalov stamped down the sand with his heavy feet in the background. The sun shone brightly and the singers sang lustily and in perfect harmony. In fact the striking thing about this funeral was the strange lack of grief.

"They are giving him a splendid funeral," said Artamonov, wiping the sweat from his face. Tikhon stood still looking down at his feet, and after a little reflection, said :

"He would have been pleased if he had known it ; he was full of fun like this daughter of his."

And he waved his arm round in the air.

"When she was a little girl, the old man used to carry her about the street, while she sang. He always gave one comfort."

And looking at his master with disrespectful and disconcerting severity, he added :

"He used to puzzle some people, because, although he never wronged anyone, he was not a righteous man."

"Righteous, righteous !" mimicked Artamonov. "These ideas hold you on a chain. Take care you don't go mad like Tulun."

And turning abruptly away from the *dvornik*, he went home.

It was still early, about midday, but already very warm, and the sand on the road and the deep blue of the atmosphere were becoming hotter and hotter. Towards evening the sun drew up mountains of white clouds, which floated slowly over the edge of the world towards the east, leaving the heat still more oppressive. Artamonov took a stroll in the garden and went out beyond the court-yard gate. Tikhon was tarring the hinges of the gate, which had become rusty during the spring rains and squeaked atrociously.

"Why are you tarring to-day when it is a holiday ?" asked Artamonov lazily, as he sat down on the bench. Tikhon turned the whites of his eyes upon him and gave him a sidelong glance :

"Seraphim was dangerous."

"Why ?"

Artamonov had the sensation of black-beetles crawling over him, as he listened to Tikhon's strange reply :

"He had too good a memory. He remembered too much. He remembered everything he saw. And what is there to be seen except evil, frivolity and vanity! These were the things he used to talk to everyone about, and he caused great alarm by doing so, I could see."

Pushing his brush into the bolts of the hinges, he went on in a still more grumbling tone:

"People must have memory knocked out of them. It causes too much mischief. And this is the way to do it. Elderly people must die and everything that is evil and stupid must perish with them. Then others must be born who don't remember anything that is evil, but only what is good. I also suffer from having a memory. I am old and want rest. But where is rest to be found? Surely in forgetfulness. . . ."

Never before had Tikhon said so much at once or spoken in such an irritating way. Stupid as they always were, his remarks on this occasion appeared for some reason particularly antagonistic; and as Artamonov contemplated his matted beard, his shifty, watery pupils and wrinkled stone-like forehead, he was astonished at the fellow's increasingly monstrous appearance. His wrinkles were unnaturally deep like the folds of leather on the leg of a boot. His face with its high cheek-bones, fleshless through age, had become as grey as pumice-stone, and his nose was as porous as a sponge.

"He has become very decrepit," thought Artamonov and the thought was a pleasant one. "He is in his dotage. He is not a worker and I must dismiss him. I'll give him compensation."

Tikhon came up to him with a brush in one hand and a small bucket of tar in the other, and pointing his brush at the factory building, which was a dark-red colour like raw meat, he muttered:

"You ought to hear what they are all saying over there—that dandy Syedov, one-eyed Morozov, his brother Zakharka, and Zinaïda too—they say straight out that a business which is built up by other men's hands is a pernicious business and ought to be destroyed. . . ."

"Those sound like your ideas," said Artamonov disdainfully.

"Mine?" Tikhon shook his head. "No, they are not mine. I have nothing to do with these plots. Let each man work for himself, and there won't be any harm done—that's my idea. But they say: 'Everything has come from us. We are masters!' And if you consider, Pyotr Ilyich, it is true. Everything does come from them! They have harnessed you to the business and you have drawn the load along a level road, but now . . ."

Artamonov grunted stiffly. Then rising to his feet, he thrust his hands in his pockets, and in spite of fumbling now and then for words, began to speak with great determination, his eyes fixed on the clouds over Tikhon's head.

"This is how it is. Of course I realize that you have spent your whole life with me. Still, you are getting old now and it is difficult for you to . . ."

"And Seraphim used to agree with all this," said Tikhon, who was apparently not listening to his master.

"Wait! It is time you had a rest."

"It is time everyone had a rest, isn't it?"

"Stop! You are difficult to get on with. . . ."

Tikhon Vyalov received the news of his dismissal without surprise.

"Well, what does it matter?" he murmured calmly.

"Of course I shall compensate you," promised Artamonov, somewhat disconcerted at his calmness. Tikhon, who was covering his dusty boots with tar, said nothing.

"This means good-bye!" said Artamonov, summing up all his firmness.

"All right," answered the *dvornik*.

Artamonov went across the river, hoping it would be cooler there. Under the pine-trees where he had quarrelled with Ilya, Seraphim had built him a sort of throne made of white branches of birch, from which there was a splendid view of the entire factory, together with the house, court-yard, village, church, and cemetery. The large windows of the factory, hospital and school were glistening like blocks of ice, and small figures were moving to and fro over the ground like shuttles, weaving the endless web of the business, while still smaller figures

ran about the sand in the factory village. Among the grey trunks of the alder-trees which grew near the fence round the church were grazing a toy herd of goats, bred by the one-eyed assistant-doctor Morozov, a grandson of the old weaver Boris—the factory women always bought large quantities of goat's milk for their children. And beyond the hospital, on a bare plot of ground enclosed by a fence, were some tiny figures of people in yellow dressing-gowns and white nightcaps, who looked like lunatics. There were a great many birds in the neighbourhood of the factory, and sparrows, crows and jackdaws abounded. Magpies chattered as they flew hurriedly from one perch to another, their white sides gleaming like satin, and dark blue pigeons walked about on the ground. And near the inn on the bank of the Vataraksha, where the peasants were in the habit of stopping when they brought in the flax, the birds were more numerous still.

But for some time past this big concern had ceased to give Artamonov any sense of either satisfaction or pride. To him it was merely the source of all the various insults which were heaped upon him. It was an insult to see different people, including his brother and nephew, shouting and waving their arms about like gipsies at a bazaar, or arguing with one another without taking the slightest notice of him, although he was the oldest man in the business. Even when they talked about the factory, they forgot about him, and when he reminded them of his existence they listened to him in silence, as if they agreed with what he said, but intended to go their own way whether the matter were great or small. This had begun long ago at the time when an electric power station had been built at the factory against his wishes, and, although Artamonov had been speedily convinced that the innovation was both safe and profitable, he could not forget the insult he had received. He had many small insults to endure, and they were continually increasing in number and becoming harder to bear.

His nephew, who had now finished his studies, was specially insolent and antagonistic. He always dressed in a leather jacket of some foreign make and glittered all over from his gold spectacles to his elegant yellow boots.

"That's old-fashioned, uncle," he would say with a wink and a frown. "It's behind the times, uncle."

He appeared to be as much afraid of the times as a servant of a stern master. But this was the only thing which frightened him. His attitude towards everything else was insufferably insolent. On one occasion he actually said:

"You must realize, uncle, that Russia cannot exist any longer with men like you in the country."

This had been such a severe blow to Artamonov that he had not even asked the reason why. He had gone away deeply offended, and for several weeks had neither visited his brother nor talked to Miron when he met him in the factory.

Miron intended to marry Vera Popova's daughter, who was as tall and graceful as her frosty, grey-haired mother. Like all girls she had a disagreeable smile, and would crane her neck forward and subject everything to the tenacious gaze of large and shamelessly wide-open eyes which had no trust in them. She had a habit of singing through her teeth and humming like a fly, and occupied herself from morning till night in spoiling linen by daubing gaily-coloured pictures on it. Her straw hat, which was tied round her neck with a ribbon, was always dangling down her back. Her hair too was straw-coloured, and she dressed untidily and showed her legs beneath her skirt almost up to her knees.

Idle Goritsvyetov was also antagonistic to him. He would flash by like a sand-martin, appearing and disappearing at unexpected moments, then appear again and spring out upon everyone like a bad-tempered dog.

"You want to turn a rich and spiritualized country like Russia into a soulless America," he would shout. "You are setting a mouse-trap for the people."

Occasionally Artamonov saw flashes of truth in these outcries, but more often they were on a par with the stupid remarks made by Tikhon Vyalov, in spite of the fact that he did not know two people more unlike each other than this mad, restless jack-in-a-box and the stolid, indifferent Tikhon. Goritsvyetov would rush up to Elizaveta Popova, shouting at her:



"Why don't you say something, you spiritual creature?"

At which she would merely smile. Her face was arrogant and immobile, and her smile was confined to her grey autumnal eyes. Artamonov often heard strange and unintelligible remarks.

"The agony of romanticism," Miron would say, as he carefully wiped his spectacles with a piece of chamois-leather.

Alexei was flitting about somewhere in Moscow. Yakov, who was growing fat, kept demurely in the background and said little. What he did say, however, was good, and equally irritating to both Miron and Goritsvyetov. He had grown a large bushy moustache like a Tatar as well as a red beard, and his sense of humour was becoming more and more marked. It was delightful to hear the lazy way in which he talked to people who were too forward:

"You will sit down in a puddle on the road leading to gentility!" he would say. "You ought to live more simply."

The elder Artamonov was much amused—and he could see that Yakov was amused too—when Elizaveta Popova suddenly went off to Moscow and married Goritsvyetov. Miron could not conceal his anger. Twisting his beard, which he wore in a point unlike other merchants, he said dryly:

"People like Styepan Goritsvyetov belong to a dying race. Nowhere in the world are there more useless people than he and his breed." A statement which was patently untrue.

"Still, one of them has been clever enough to carry off the morsel you were in love with, from under your nose!" said Yakov teasingly.

"I am not a romantic," replied Miron, raising his shoulders.

"Not what? Whom are you talking of?" asked Artamonov.

Miron struck an attitude like a judge reading out his award.

"No one understands what romanticism is, and you can't understand either, uncle. It is something that stands for beauty like a wig on a bald head, or for caution like a swindler's false beard."

"Aha, I have pulled his leg this time," thought Artamonov with delight.

Little pleasures like these helped to reconcile him somewhat to the many insults which he received from impertinent people who were taking the business more and more into their own grasping hands and driving him into solitary retirement. But he found a melancholy pleasure even in solitude, for it gave him a new acquaintance whom he had only known vaguely before—a Pyotr Artamonov of quite another mould and character.

He was a good fellow who had been cruelly wronged, and whom life was treating with the injustice of a stepmother. He had started life as the dumb and humble servant of a father who had never given him any pleasure, but had saddled him with a stupid, tiresome wife and placed the burden of a big business upon his shoulders. Yes, his wife loved him and the first year he had spent with her had not been bad, but now he knew that even the dissolute winder Zinaïda was able to give him a more ardent and diverting affection—of the women at the fair it was better not to remind himself. All her life Natalya had been afraid, first of all of Alexei and kerosene lamps, afterwards of electric lamps, and whenever they were switched on she started back and crossed herself. She had caused him much embarrassment at the gramophone shop at the fair.

“*Oi*, don’t buy one. You mustn’t!” she had implored. “There may be a devil shouting inside that case. His soul may be hidden there!”

At present she was afraid of Miron, Yakovlyev the doctor, and her daughter Tatyana. She was becoming strangely stout and ate all day, yet it had been on her account that his brother had nearly strangled himself. Her children did not respect her, and whenever she tried to induce Yakov to marry he would say sarcastically:

“*Mama*, you had far better have something to eat.”

Her reply was always humble and tentative:

“But I don’t seem to want anything.”

And she would start eating once more.

“Why do you laugh at your mother?” Artamonov said to Yakov on one occasion. “It is time you married!”

"These aren't the times for tying myself to a family," was Yakov's businesslike reply.

"Why are all of you so afraid of these times?" asked Artamonov angrily.

Yakov shrugged his shoulders without answering, and he too said :

"You don't understand, *Papasha*."

He said this quite gently; but still it is surely impossible for a father to understand less than his son. People live in the atmosphere of yesterday, not of to-morrow. It is the same with everybody.

Artamonov's eldest son and favourite child had vanished. Out of his love for him he had been obliged to do a thing which he did not want to remember.

His eldest daughter Yelena, a broad-faced, broad-hipped woman, had been spoilt by wealth and a drunken husband, and was a complete stranger to him. Whenever she came to pay one of her rare visits to her parents, she appeared magnificently dressed and wore a great many rings on her fingers. Rattling her gold chains and trinkets, she would glance through her gold lorgnettes with *blasé* eyes and say in a languid voice :

"What a horrid smell there is here! The whole house is musty. It is rotting away. You ought to build a new one. Besides, who lives next door to a factory nowadays!"

Artamonov chanced to hear her saying to her mother :

"Is *Papasha* the same as ever? How dull it must be for you! My husband is a drunkard and a scamp, but he is gay."

She had a particularly exasperating passion for cleanliness. Whenever she sat down on a chair, she dusted it with her handkerchief, and smelt so strongly of scent that it made one want to sneeze. Her unmannerly dislike of everything in the house filled Artamonov with a desire to pay her out for all the irritation she caused him. Accordingly whenever she was present, he walked about the house and even the court-yard dressed in nothing but his underclothes and an ungirded dressing-gown, with galoshes on his bare feet; and at dinner he would munch noisily and make noises like a Bashkir.

"What are you doing, *Papasha*?" his daughter would inquire agitatedly.

This was precisely what he wanted.

"Excuse me, madam!" he would say. "I'm a peasant, you know."

And he would go on belching and munching more furiously than ever.

Yelena had often been abroad, and in the evening she would tell her mother garbled stories in her lazy, fat little voice: "In one town," she would say, "the women wash the outside walls of their houses with brushes and soap. In another town the fog is so thick both in summer and winter that the street-lamps are kept burning all day, and even then nothing can be seen. In Paris everyone sells ready-made dresses, and there is a tower there which is so high that one can see towns across the sea from the top of it."

She was constantly quarrelling with her younger sister and even abusing her. Tatyana, who was growing up into rather a thin dark-complexioned girl, was soured by the fact that she was not good-looking. There was something about her—it must have been the combination of a short pigtail, flat chest and bluish nose—which called up memories of a church clerk. She lived with her sister, being unable for some reason or other to finish her studies at the gymnasium, was afraid of mice, agreed with Miron that the Tsar's power ought to be restricted, and had lately started smoking cigarettes. When she came to the factory in the summer, she scolded her mother as though she were a servant, murmured inaudibly when she spoke to her father, read books all day, and in the evening went to see her uncle in the town, whence she was escorted back by Yakovlyev, the doctor with a gold tooth. She was too love-sick to sleep at night, and spent her time hitting gnats on the wall with a slipper, which sounded as if she were firing a pistol.

The world in which Artamonov lived was becoming strange, noisy and increasingly stupid, together with everything in it, from the insolent speeches made by Miron to the silly songs of Vaska the stoker, a lame peasant with a dislocated hip and

a head as dishevelled as a hearth-brush. On holidays Vaska, who was courting the cook, would appear beneath the kitchen window and, accompanying himself on a concertina, bawl out with his eyes shut :

“Poor little girl, I hold you fast,  
By cords of habit round us cast;  
Now every hour I want to see  
Your little visage close to me.”

Olga had not given him any news of Ilya lately, and this new Pyotr Artamonov who had been so much wronged kept thinking of his eldest son more and more frequently. Probably the boy's obstinacy had by this time met with the reward it deserved, as was apparent from the changed attitude towards him in Alexei's house. Artamonov went there one evening, and as he was taking off his coat in the hall he heard Miron, who had just returned from Moscow, remark :

“Ilya is one of those people who look at life through a book and don't know the difference between a cow and a horse.”

“That's a lie,” thought Artamonov, taking comfort in his nephew's unfriendly remark.

“Is he in the same set as Goritsvyetov ?” asked Alexei.

“No, in a more obnoxious one,” replied Miron.

“You wait,” thought Artamonov threateningly, as he entered the room. “He'll come back and then he'll teach you a lesson. . . .”

Miron at once began telling stories about Moscow and complaining angrily against the stupidity of the government. Then Natalya and Yakov arrived, and he began saying how necessary it was to build a paper factory, a scheme with which he had been lately wearying everyone.

“We have money lying idle, uncle,” he said. At this Natalya flushed so red that even her ears swelled up.

“Where is it lying, and who has it ?” she exclaimed at the top of her voice.

A wave of boredom swept over Artamonov, just as if a door had been opened before him leading into a room where everything was so wearisomely familiar that the room appeared to

be empty. This sense of physical boredom suddenly came upon him from outside like a fog, stopping up his ears, blinding his eyes, overwhelming him with fatigue, and frightening him with thoughts of disease and death.

"I am tired of you," he said. "When will you let me rest?"

"There's quite enough worry with what we have," murmured Yakov.

"And there are so many workpeople about that one simply can't go out!" shouted Natalya. "What with drunkenness and foul language . . ."

Artamonov went to the window—there in the garden stood Tikhon Vyalov, scratching his head, and pointing out an apple-tree to some little girl with his finger.

"*Isb*, you Adam!" thought Pyotr Artamonov, shaking off his mood of boredom. Remote thoughts such as these often darted across his mind like mice. He was always delighted by their unexpectedness, and in fact even welcomed them because they merely flashed through his brain and disappeared, without causing him any anxiety.

As for Tikhon, Pyotr Artamonov felt he had received a cruel insult when he saw that the *dvornik* had been taken back by Alexei, after disappearing for over a year and then suddenly appearing again with the unpleasant news that Nikita had escaped from the monastery and gone no one knew where. Pyotr was sure that the old man knew where Nikita was, but would not tell them simply because he liked being disagreeable, and he had a fierce argument with Alexei about him.

Alexei, however, defended himself most convincingly:

"Think for a moment—he worked for us all his life and then we cast him off! Now, is that right?"

Pyotr knew it was not right, but this only made Tikhon's presence in the house more unwelcome. His wife too, apparently for the first time in her life, was taking Alexei's side. With a firmness which was unusual for her, she said:

"It isn't right, Pyotr Ilyich. You may beat me for it, but all the same I say it isn't right!"

Olga and the rest used their persuasion to pacify him. But the wronged man in Artamonov said pompously:

"What are you thinking of? Your will isn't law to anyone. . . . Don't you see?"

Artamonov was becoming more and more conscious of the personality of this wronged man. After carrying his heavy frame cautiously up to the pine-tree on the hill, he sat down in the arm-chair there, and thought about him with heart-felt pity. It was sweet and yet bitter to imagine this man as unhappy, misunderstood and unappreciated, but nevertheless a good fellow; and he found this imaginary picture was easy to create out of nothing, just like the white smoky clouds which on warm days rose into the blue sky above the marshes.

As he glanced at the factory and all it had produced, the wronged man in him whispered:

"You could live quite differently if you chose, without any of these contrivances."

"Those are Tikhon's ideas," replied Artamonov the manufacturer.

"Father Glyeb said the same thing, and so did Goritsvyetov and many others. Yes, people are like flies struggling in a spider's web."

"You wouldn't be able to live cheaply enough," replied the manufacturer reluctantly.

Sometimes this unspoken discussion between his two personalities grew very heated and the wronged man would become unmerciful.

"Remember," he would almost scream, "that when you got drunk at the fair, you confessed that you had offered up your son as a sacrifice just as Abraham offered Isaac, and that the Nikonov boy had been thrust upon you instead of a ram. Don't you remember? That's true, quite true! And for telling you the truth you struck me with a bottle. *Ekk*, you crushed the life out of me, you destroyed me! You offered me up as a sacrifice too. And to whom did you offer sacrifice? To whom? To the horned god Nikita told you about? Was it to him? *Ekk*, you . . ."

During these bitter disputes Artamonov the manufacturer would keep his eyes tightly shut, so as to hold back his tears

of anger, shame and bitterness. But they would stream down uncontrollably in spite of him, and after wiping them away from his cheeks and beard with his hands, he would rub his palms together until they were dry and dully examine his swollen purple hands. He also took large gulps of Madeira straight from the mouth of the bottle.

Still, Artamonov liked this wronged man in spite of the tears of grief that he wrung from him, finding him as indispensable as the bathing-man who rubs one with soft, soapy, warm bast-fibre on the part of one's back it is impossible to scratch, because one's hand will not reach it.

Suddenly a powerful fist rose up far away on the other side of Siberia and began to strike at Russia.

Alexei kept bounding about, waving the newspaper in the air and shouting:

"Robbery! Plunder!" And lifting a bird-like claw towards the ceiling, he would make a ferocious gesture with his fingers.

"We'll teach them a lesson!" he would whisper. "We'll teach them a lesson!"

The doctor with the gold tooth would stand leaning against the warm tiles of the stove with his hands in his pockets, muttering:

"Possibly it is they who will teach us a lesson."

This big man with the coppery beard had of course a smile on his face. He always smiled whatever was said, and even when he talked about disease and death, his face wore the same little smile as it did when he spoke of an unsuccessful game of preference.<sup>1</sup> Artamonov looked upon him as a foreigner who smiles out of sheer embarrassment at being unable to understand strange people. He neither liked him nor believed in him, and always went to the doctor in the town, a taciturn German named Kron.

Twirling his beard and frowning as if he had a headache, Miron would absordedly pace from one corner of the room to another and lecture everybody:

<sup>1</sup> A card-game resembling whist.



"Things ought to have begun with an alliance with the English."

"What things do you mean?" the eldest Artamonov would inquire. But neither his impudent brother nor his clever nephew could give him any intelligible information beyond the fact that a war had suddenly broken out. He took pleasure in watching the confusion of these two omniscient and self-confident people, his brother in particular appearing highly ridiculous, since his incomprehensible behaviour led one to suppose that this unexpected war had been embarked upon for the express purpose of causing annoyance to him—Alexei Artamonov—and preventing him from engaging in some very important undertaking.

A religious procession passed through the town. Bearded merchants, gravely trampling down a heavy fall of snow beneath their ponderous feet, walked like a compact herd of bulls behind the burly, gilded figures of the clergy. Ikons and banners were carried, and the united choirs of all the churches in the town sang in loud inspiring tones:

"O Lor-d, save Thy pe-ople . . ."

The words of the prayer, which sounded more like a demand, came out of their rounded mouths like white steam, covering the eyebrows and moustaches of the basses with hoar-frost, and settling on the beards of the merchants who were joining discordantly in the singing. Even more persistent and penetrating, and still more out of tune, was the voice of Voronov, the mayor of the town and son of a cartwright. He was a big man with red cheeks and eyes the colour of mother-of-pearl buttons, and had inherited his father's indomitable hostility towards all the Artamonovs as well as his fortune.

The seven Artamonovs were all walking together. Alexei was limping along in front with his wife on his arm, and behind came Yakov with his mother and his sister Tatyana. Then came Miron and the doctor, and last of all, striding along in soft boots, came Pyotr.

"The nation!" said Miron softly.

"A review of its forces!" replied the doctor.

Miron took off his spectacles and began wiping them with his handkerchief.

"They'll beat us, you'll see!" added the doctor.

"Well, nothing after all will catch fire very quickly in this damp . . ."

"Stop it!" said Artamonov, addressing his nephew. Throwing him a sidelong glance, the latter proceeded to hang his spectacles on his long nose, after giving it a preliminary rub with his fingers.

"O Lord, sa-ve Thy people," pleaded Voroponov with loud emphasis; and as he hissed out the word "people" he turned round and walked backwards like a wolf, gazing at the townspeople, and waving his beaver cap at them for some reason or other.

Pomyalov's daughter, still fresh, plump and broad-chested in spite of her forty years, sang in a fine deep voice. She was now a widow for the third time and unrivalled in the town for loose living. Artamonov heard her giving advice *sotto voce* to Natalya:

"You should send your husband off to the war, my friend. He is so dreadful to look at that the enemy will run away from him."

And the question she kept asking Yakov was:

"Why don't you marry?"

Artamonov shook his head. Conversation like flies prevented him from thinking about matters of greater import, and withdrawing from the crowd he began walking along the pavement at a slower pace so as to let the stream of people go past him. They looked blacker than usual that day against the spotless splendour of the snow, and as they moved on they breathed out steam like boiling samovars.

There was Vera Popova with a face of stone walking at the head of her schoolgirls. Snowflakes glistened on her grey hair, and her eyelashes were white with the frost, and quivered when she nodded her head, which had no covering except her magnificent hair. Artamonov felt sorry for her.

"The stupid woman!" he thought. "She has harnessed herself to the task of taking ducks out to pasture."

A long wave of cropped heads rolled by belonging to the boys at the two town schools. Then half a company of soldiers moved past like a cumbersome grey machine, led by cold-blooded Lieutenant Mavrin, a celebrated personage in the town. He bathed every day in the Oka from the time of the spring floods to the first frosts in autumn, and, as was well known, carried on an illicit love affair with Pomyalov's daughter and lived on her money.

Nyestyerenko the police officer, who had a moustache like a Chinaman, walked gravely along like a stuffed goose, and his invalid wife held the arm of her brother Zhiteikin, the son of the late *starosta* of the town and the owner of a tannery. It was said that, in spite of his dissolute behaviour with nuns, Zhiteikin had read seven hundred books and was remarkably proficient at beating the small drum. In fact he even instructed soldiers in this art in secret.

Then stout Steypan Barski drove by in a sledge with his drunken son-in-law and squint-eyed daughter. And behind them like rats trailed a dark crowd of smaller fry: burghers of the town, tanners, weavers, cartwrights, beggars, and unwanted old women. Snowflakes fell idly down, sprinkling their bare heads, and from far away in the distance came the sound of Voroponov's inexorable, exacting cry:

"O Lord, save Thy people . . ."

"What do all these people mean to God? It's a thing one can't understand," thought Artamonov. He did not like the townspeople and, except for some business acquaintances, had hardly any friends in the town. He knew also that they did not like him either, and thought him proud and bad-tempered. Alexei on the other hand was much respected on account of his passion for beautifying the town, actuated by which he had paved the main street, adorned the square with lime trees, and laid out gardens and a boulevard on the bank of the Oka. Miron, however, and even Yakov were feared, and considered excessively greedy, because it was discovered that they were getting the whole neighbourhood into their own hands.

Artamonov surveyed the slow-moving, thoughtful procession

with knitted brows, for many faces he did not know and many eyes of a variety of hues were gazing at him with the same expression of dislike.

At the gate of Alexei's house he was greeted by Tikhon.

"Shall we go to war, old man?" he asked him.

Tikhon stroked his cheek with a familiar movement of his heavy hand. It was the first time during all the years they had spent together that Artamonov had shown any trust in him.

"What do you think?"

"I think it is a trivial matter," replied Vyalov at once, as if he were expecting another question.

"You call everything trivial," said Artamonov vaguely.

"And why not? We are dogs, aren't we, not wild animals?"

Artamonov went on his way through the fine dusty snow. It was snowing more heavily now, and the crowd in the distance was almost blotted out among the white mounds formed by the trees and roofs.

Now that Seraphim the Comforter was dead, Artamonov was in the habit of seeking distraction in the company of a deacon's widow called Taisya Paraklitova, a thin woman of uncertain age, who looked like a cross between a lad in his teens and a black goat. She was quiet and always agreed with him in everything:

"Yes, dear!" she would say. "Yes, quite right, dear!"

Although Artamonov drank a great deal he was slow in becoming intoxicated, and it irritated him to find that melancholy and depressing thoughts took so long to fade from his mind and drown themselves in Taisya's strong and tasty brands of vodka. The first moments of intoxication were unpleasant, for the effect of it was to fill his mind with still more malignant and bitter thoughts about himself and other people. It painted his whole life in angry colours like the green of the marshes and gave him a sense of rapid movement in some seething vortex, in which he appeared to be spinning round and round under expectation of being hurled the next moment over the edge. Grinding his teeth and straining his eyes and ears, he would watch the dark tumult that surged within him, and shout at the deacon's widow:

"Well, why don't you say something? Tell me what you know!"

At this the woman would spring on to his knees like a goat—she was astonishingly light and warm—and opening an invisible book, would begin to read.

"Pomyalova has dismissed Lieutenant Mavrin from favour because he has again lost three hundred and twenty roubles at cards. She has a bill against him and wants to protest it. And the policeman is keeping his wife here, not because she is ill, but because he has established his mistress in the town."

"That's all nonsense," said Artamonov.

"Yes, it is, dear. And what ridiculous nonsense too!"

The stories she told about trivial incidents in the town served to distract Artamonov's thoughts, and at the same time to justify and even increase his dislike of those dull sinners, the townsfolk. In place of the thoughts that she banished there rose before him pictures of uproarious revelry at the fair. Scenes passed before him, in which violent men flung themselves about, greedily rolling their drunken but ever greedy eyes; in which they burnt their money without showing the slightest sign of regret, and displayed all the fierce lusts of madmen.

As Pyotr Artamonov sat silently imbibing different-coloured vodkas and chewing sour slippery mushrooms, he felt with every nerve in his drunken body that the most pleasing, real and mysteriously powerful influence in his life had been that abandoned woman at the fair, who had been bribed to show herself naked, and for whose sake well-known men parted with their money, sense of shame and health. But all that life had left him was this black goat of a woman.

Amid these amusements time flowed by unnoticed, although every now and then something completely incomprehensible would leap out of its turbid stream. During the winter news arrived that the workmen in St. Petersburg wanted to destroy the palace and murder the Tsar.

"They will even pull down the churches," muttered Tikhon Vyalov. "Why shouldn't they? The people are not made of iron."

In the summer there was a rumour afloat that a Russian ship was sailing the Russian seas, firing gunshots at the towns.

"And why shouldn't they?" said Tikhon. "People have become accustomed to making war."

Once more the ikons were borne in procession through the town, and Voroponov, dressed in a rust-red frock-coat, carried a portrait of the Tsar.

"O Lord, save Thy pe-ople!" he pleaded.

This time his cry was still louder and more angry, but still the way he said "pe-ople" made his call for help sound anxious.

Zhiteikin, drunk and hatless, with a double-barrelled gun in his hands and his bald patch glowing purple, walked at the head of his tanners.

"Lads!" he bawled fiercely. "We won't give Russia to the Jews! Whom does Russia belong to? To us!"

"To us!" shouted the tanners in chorus. They too were far from being sober, and when they met their sworn foes, the weavers, they picked a quarrel with them and struck Doctor Yakovlyev with a stick and threw the old apothecary into the Oka. Zhiteikin chased his son round the town for a long time and twice fired his gun at him; but his son did not fall, and he only succeeded in wounding the tailor, Bruskov, and hitting him in the back with small shot.

The factory stopped working and, tucking up their shirt-sleeves, the young men rushed into the town, regardless of the exhortations of Miron and other sensible people and of the women's cries and tears.

The buildings became lifeless and deserted and seemed to shrivel up beneath the force of the wind, which was rising in rebellion like the workpeople, now howling and whistling, now lashing the factory with icy rain, now covering the chimney with sticky snow and then washing it off again.

As he sat by the window, Artamonov with dull eyes watched the little dark figures of men and women streaming in and out of the town like ants. He could hear their shouts through the window-panes and judged that they were in a merry mood. From the gate where the lame stoker, Vaska Krotov, was

singing a song, surrounded by a crowd of workmen, came the scream of a concertina :

“ We fight the Japanese  
For room to live at ease ;  
Hard they strike, but we may beat them,  
Having ikons to defeat them.”

Borne on the wind, there came from the town a low muttering sound, as if an enormous samovar were boiling there, filled with the water of an entire lake. Alexei's horse and carriage drove into the court-yard, with Morozov, the one-eyed assistant-doctor, sitting on the box. Olga jumped out, wrapped up in a shawl, and at the sight of her Artamonov took alarm and, forgetting the pain in his legs, sprang up and went to meet her.

“ What has happened ? ”

She shook herself like a hen and said :

“ The tanners have broken our windows.”

Artamonov smiled as he made room for her to pass.

“ Well,” he muttered, “ so that's what all this chatter has led to ! They have been screaming at me all this time, and now look what has happened ! No, the Tsar. . . .”

But suddenly he heard Olga answer him in an angry and, for her, unusually loud tone of voice :

“ Be quiet ! That Tsar of yours is a dishonourable man ! ”

“ You know a lot about Tsars,” he said disconcertedly, as his hand went up to his ear.

The anger shown by this little old woman in spectacles, who was always so quiet and uncritical, filled him with astonishment. Despite their pitiful uselessness, her words were strikingly sincere, like the squeak of a mouse at the bull who has trodden on her tail and neither sees nor wants to see that he has done so. Artamonov sat down in his arm-chair and thought.

He had not seen Olga for several weeks, because he had been trying to avoid meeting Miron, with whom he had had a quarrel. At the end of the summer, when he had been laid up with a swollen leg, Voroponov had come to see him,

solemn and perspiring, and with much smacking of his heavy blue lips had suggested that he should sign a telegram to the Tsar requesting the latter not to yield his power to anyone. Artamonov had been much surprised at the audacity of the mayor's plan, but had nevertheless signed the paper, convinced that both his brother and Miron would be displeased at his having done so. Voroponov too would probably receive a severe reprimand from St. Petersburg. "You shouldn't be such a busybody, you thick-lipped fool," he thought, "and you shouldn't put on airs!"

Having put the paper in the pocket of his frock-coat and buttoned up every button, Voroponov began making complaints against Alexei, Miron, the doctor, and everyone who, under the pressure of Jewish influence, opposed the Tsar, either inadvertently or from motives of self-interest. Artamonov listened to these complaints, with which he heartily sympathized, with a feeling akin to pleasure, and it was not until Voroponov's blue lips began to make malicious statements about Vera Popova that he said sternly:

"Vera Nikolayevna has nothing to do with this."

"What do you mean by 'nothing to do with this'? We know well that . . ."

"You know nothing."

"You are riding for a fall," threatened the mayor as he left.

That evening his nephew and his daughter fell upon Artamonov like dogs and barked at him, showing no mercy on his old age.

"What are you doing, *Papasha*?" screamed Tatyana, her eyes set in a plain face dancing like a mad-woman's. Yakov was standing at the window, drumming on the glass with his finger, and Artamonov had the impression that even he was against him.

"Have you read what it says in this paper?" Miron asked sharply.

"No, I haven't," said Artamonov. "I haven't read it, but I know it says that young puppies ought not to be given their freedom!"



It pleased him to see how angry Miron and Tatyana were, but Yakov's silence was disconcerting. He believed in his son's business capacity and guessed that he had acted against his interests, but his own self-respect would not allow him to draw Yakov into this dispute and to ask him what he thought. So he lay snarling and growling while Miron went on talking mechanically, with his nose in the air :

"You must realize that the Tsar is surrounded by a gang of rascals, and that their places must be taken by honest men."

Artamonov knew that honest men were the very people on whom Miron had his eye. He knew also that Alexei was constantly going to Moscow in order to solicit Miron's appointment as a candidate for the Imperial Duma. But in his own opinion the idea of presenting his crane of a nephew with any post near the Tsar was as ridiculous as it was dangerous. Suddenly Alexei rushed in with his clothes all dishevelled and unbuttoned and started jumping about.

"What have you been doing, you madman?" he burst out, and proceeded to rate him like a servant.

"Damn you!" roared Artamonov. "What are you lecturing me for? Go to the devil, all of you! Get out!"

He had even frightened himself by this sudden outburst of rage.

Now, as he sat in a corner listening to Olga's good-humoured account of the riot in the town, he remembered this quarrel and tried to understand who was right—he or these other people.

He found the childish anger in Olga's words particularly disturbing, but now she was speaking calmly, even touchingly, again :

"Our weavers are dear fellows! You should have seen how promptly they drove off Voroponov's workmen and tanners. And they have stayed to guard the house."

But Natalya, who was very frightened, whimpered angrily :

"It was at your house the riot started. You have only got what you deserved. It's all your fault."

Then Miron appeared, and without saying how-do-you-do begun pacing up and down the room with a springy stride.

"All these men like Voroponov and Zhiteikin shall pay dearly for inciting the people to riot," he threatened. "They won't be let off. They shall answer for this! The people have had quite enough lessons in rioting from the friends of Ilya Pyetrovich Artamonov, and if these men start too . . ."

Artamonov said nothing.

• After the scandal caused by Voroponov's petition he became definitely and irreconcilably opposed to Miron, though he saw that the factory was entirely in his hands. Miron conducted the business with skill and confidence, and the workmen, who were more peaceably inclined than the men in the town, either obeyed or feared him.

The wind had died down and buried itself in the thick snow, which was falling straight down in heavy flakes, covering the windows with a white curtain and blotting out everything in the court-yard. No one spoke to Artamonov, and he felt that everyone except his wife considered that he was to blame for all their calamities—riots, bad weather, and the fact that the Tsar's behaviour was injudicious.

"Where is Yasha?" asked his mother anxiously. "Yasha, I say, where is he?"

Miron wrinkled up his nose in disdain.

"He is probably in the town hiding in his hen-house," he said without looking at his aunt.

"What? Where do you say he is?" murmured Natalya in alarm.

"I suppose she doesn't know, poor fool, that Yakov has a mistress," thought Artamonov.

And all of a sudden he said firmly:

"Well, live as you please! Go your own way. I don't really understand. I'm an old man. . . . This is the devil's game. I have lived a lifetime and I don't understand even now. . . ."

## PART IV

UP to the age of twenty-six Yakov led a quiet and orderly existence without encountering any very disagreeable experiences, but after that time the enemy of men who love a quiet life began to play a low intricate game with him. It began one night in April three years after the riots which had caused such upheavals among the patient masses.

Yakov was lying, smoking, on a sofa, revelling in a sense of satiety from which every longing was excluded. It was a sensation which he valued more highly than any other, seeing that it contained the whole meaning of life, and appeared equally pleasant whether as the result of love-making or an excellent dinner.

Near the table in the middle of the room a slim woman with rounded limbs stood gazing thoughtfully at the angry purple flame of the spirit-lamp under the coffee-pot. The light of the lamp under its red shade shone upon her bare arms and childlike face, tinging them the colour of perfectly cooked pastry, and her tousled dark hair lay picturesquely scattered over her neck and shoulders. Over her naked body Polina wore a golden-yellow Bokhara dressing-gown, and on her feet were green morocco-leather slippers. There was a suggestion of lightness about her which was not in the least Russian. She had the engaging face of a boy in his teens, with full lips and challenging eyes as round as cherries. She was of course incomparably superior to all the girls and women Yakov knew, and would have been perfect if it had not been for her stupidity of character.

"I don't want any coffee, my little orange," said Yakov through a thick veil of cigarette smoke.

"And what about me?" asked Polina, without looking at him.

"I don't know what you want," replied Yakov, yawning wearily.

"Yes, you do," snapped Polina before the words were out of his mouth, and shaking her head, she began to talk in a cracked voice. After listening to this jarring, grating sound for a moment or two, Yakov sat up, threw his cigarette on the floor and began putting on his boots.

"I don't understand your habit of spoiling my good humour," he said with a sigh. "Surely you know that I can't marry until my father dies."

At this remark Polina inundated him as usual with torrents of abuse.

"Of course, being in a good humour is all you think about, you spider! I know you are ready to sell me to a Tatar or an old-clothes man for the sake of being in a good humour! Yes! You are a dishonourable man."

Yakov particularly disliked her calling him a spider—in moments of affection she had another amusing name for him, my little salty one—and to-day at least he thought she might have refrained from quarrelling, since it was only two hours ago that he had given her a hundred roubles.

"You won't get anything by screaming," he warned her calmly as he put on his hat and held out his hand. "Good-bye!"

"You pig! You have been throwing your cigarette ends on the floor again. . . ."

A damp wind was sweeping along the street and shadows of clouds were creeping over the ground, as if they wished to wipe up the puddles. Now and then the moon peeped out, and the water in the pools, which were covered with a thin layer of ice, gleamed like brass. Winter was obstinately refusing to give way to spring that year and only the day before there had been a heavy fall of snow.

As Yakov Artamonov strolled along with his hands in his pockets and a heavy stick under his arm, he thought how extraordinarily stupid people were. What was it that dear

silly little Polina wanted? She led a quiet life without worries of any kind, received a great number of presents, dressed beautifully, and spent about a hundred roubles a month. Yakov knew and felt that she liked him. What more could she want than that? Why did she want to marry him?

"As stupid as a mouse in a pot of jam," he concluded, making use of his favourite saying and one which he had invented himself. Life seemed to him a simple matter that made no demands upon a man beyond what he actually possessed. On the whole, it was surely evident that everyone was aiming at the same ideal—the ideal of perfect peace. The activities of the day were nothing more than a rather disagreeable prelude to the quietness of the night. The reason why people were stupid was because almost all of them, either privately or openly, considered themselves cleverer than he, and because they made so many more inventions than were necessary. Possibly it was blindness which made them act in this way, and prompted every man to distinguish himself from his fellows for fear of losing himself in the crowd and being unable to see himself.

Ilya was stupid because he had got involved in books even when he was studying at the gymnasium, and was now consorting with Socialists. Yakov had suffered many insults from him and had lately been obliged to send him money somewhere in Siberia. His mother's stupidity was intolerable as well as being ridiculous, and still more intolerable and distressing was the stupidity of his surly, drunken, dirty father, the old bear who could not live with other people. Alexei, his restless jack-in-a-box of an uncle, was ridiculous. He wanted to get into the Imperial Duma, and with this end in view he fed on newspapers, ingratiated himself with everyone in the town, and curried favour with the factory-hands like a dissolute old woman. The stupidity of his cousin Miron with the large nose was still more appalling. It almost suffocated one. He considered that he was the most able man in Russia, saw himself as a future minister, and already took no pains to conceal the fact that he was the only person who saw

clearly how everyone ought to act and think. He too was trying to curry favour with the workmen by arranging different kinds of amusements for them, organizing a football team, founding a library, and in general attempting to feed wolves on carrots.

The workmen wove magnificent linen, but lived in a state of drunken squalor. They too, as a class, lay under some spell of stupidity, insolent in its frankness and devoid even of the simple homely slyness which is the characteristic of every peasant. Yakov Artamonov had been obliged to give more thought to the workpeople than to anyone else because he came into collision with them every day. Even as a young man they had inspired him with feelings of animosity. That was the time when he had been constantly coming into sharp collision with young weavers over girls, and some of his rivals apparently remembered their old wrongs up to the present day. He had twice been pelted with stones at night, even as a beardless youth, and more than once his mother had been obliged to pay down a sum of money in order to save him from scandal and the screams of women.

"Why do you behave so dissolutely?" she would say admonishingly on these occasions. "You ought to wait until you can marry, or can get hold of one woman and live with her. They will complain to your father about you, and he'll send you away just like Ilya."

During the two or three years that the riots lasted, Yakov did not notice any special signs of danger at the factory. Still Miron's harangues and his uncle Alexei's anxious sighs and the newspapers—he was not fond of reading them himself—which recorded the progress of the workmen's movement with officious malevolence and openly expressed threats, and printed the speeches made by their representatives at the Duma—all these things inspired him with animosity towards the factory-hands and a mortifying sense of his dependence upon them. These feelings, however, he thought he had now trained himself to hide skilfully beneath a veil of smiles and jests and by deferring to the workmen's demands in small matters. Still the general state of affairs was not

at all bad, in spite of an occasional disturbance which would suddenly overwhelm him with embarrassment and make him feel that he, Yakov Artamonov the factory-owner, was the guest of the men who were working for him. And while he on his side was conscious of being heartily tired of his long sojourn amongst them, they would look at him for their part in bored silence, as much as to say:

"Why don't you go away? It is high time!"

Whenever these experiences occurred, he had a vague presentiment that some secret and invisible form of decay was setting in at the factory, and that some great personal danger was smouldering away in the dark, waiting for the moment to assail him.

Yakov was sure that man was a simple creature, who loved simplicity more than anything else and was incapable of either originating or harbouring any revolutionary ideas. These suffocating fumes of unrest had their existence apart from man, and it was only when he was corrupted by them that his actions became alarming and incomprehensible. It was far better to know nothing about such noxious ideas nor to rouse them into activity. But in spite of his dislike of them, Yakov felt their presence about him, and saw that, instead of undoing the knots so tightly tied by the general stupidity of mankind, they did nothing but make a tangle of all the plain and simple things which made his life worth living.

Of all the men he knew, he thought the most intelligent was old Tikhon Vyalov, and as he watched the quiet way he treated people and the condescending way he did his work he was filled with envy. Tikhon even slept intelligently, with his ear pressed close to his pillow or the ground, as if he were trying to catch some sound.

"Do you dream?" he asked the old man.

"Why should I dream? I'm not a woman," said Tikhon, and behind his words Yakov was conscious of some hard, unyielding and immovable force.

"Women's dreams," he thought, as he listened to the disputes and arguments that went on in his uncle Alexei's house, and he smiled to himself at the thought.

He generally found some difficulty in thinking, and whenever he was in a pensive mood he moved along heavily as if he were carrying a great weight, with his head bent down and his eyes fixed on his feet. He was walking along in this way after having left Polina on this particular night, and therefore failed to notice the appearance of a stumpy grey figure, until it flourished an arm high above his head. Yakov at once dropped on his knees, and snatching a revolver from the pocket of his overcoat pressed it against the leg of the man who had assaulted him and fired. The shot sounded dull and faint, but the man sprang away, struck his shoulder against some palings, and with a groan slipped from the palings to the ground.

Not till then did Yakov realize that he was frightened to death, so frightened, in fact, that he wanted to scream and could not. His hands were trembling and his legs refused to obey him when he tried to rise from his knees. Two yards away from him a bare-headed, curly-haired man was rolling about on the ground, and he also was making efforts to stand up.

"I'll shoot you, you scoundrel!" said Yakov hoarsely, and he was just stretching out his hand with the revolver when the man turned a broad face towards him.

"You have shot me already," he murmured.

Then Yakov recognized him, and he too uttered a murmur of astonishment:

"Noskov? *Akh*, you villain! Is it really you?"

Yakov's fright rapidly gave way to a feeling akin to joy—a feeling evoked not only by the consciousness of having successfully warded off an assault, but by the fact that his assailant had turned out to be a stranger, and not a factory-hand as he had imagined. Noskov was a huntsman and used to play the concertina at weddings, being a bachelor himself. He lodged with Paraklitova, the deacon's widow, and until that night no one in the town had ever said a word against him.

"What is your game?" said Yakov, getting on his feet and looking round.



There was no sound except the wind stirring the branches of the trees above the palings.

"What is my game?" asked Noskov suddenly in a loud voice. "I wanted to play a joke on you and give you a fright. That's all. But you went bang-bang at once! We shall get into trouble for this, you'll see! I was even frightened myself."

"*Akh*, is that all?" said Artamonov in the laughing tone of a conqueror. "Well, get up and we'll go to the police."

"I can't go. You have crippled me."

And, picking up his cap, Noskov looked inside it and added:

"But I'm not afraid of the police."

"Well, we'll see when we get there. Get up!"

"I'm not afraid," repeated Noskov. "But how are you going to prove that it was I who attacked you, and not you who attacked me from fright? That's one thing to consider!"

"Yes, it is. And is there another?" asked Yakov with a smile, somewhat astonished at Noskov's coolness.

"Yes, there is. I can be useful to you."

"That's a fairy-tale!"

And pointing the revolver at Noskov's face, Yakov suddenly threatened him.

"I'll blow your brains out!" he said angrily.

Noskov raised his eyes and once more lowered them to his cap.

"Don't make a scandal," he said insinuatingly. "You can't prove anything, although you are a rich man. I tell you, I wanted to play a joke on you. I know your father and have played the concertina to him many times."

Abruptly flinging his cap on his head, he bent down and began pulling up the leg of his trousers, groaning as he did so. Then he took a handkerchief from his pocket and proceeded to bind it round his leg, which was wounded above the knee. He went on muttering to himself all the time, but Yakov, who was full of misgivings about the extraordinary behaviour of this unsuccessful robber, paid no attention to what he said.

With a rapidity which was unusual for him, Yakov Artamonov was considering the advisability of leaving Noskov

here by the palings while he went to the town, called up the night-watchman, and told him to guard the wounded man. Then he would have to go to the police and give evidence about the assault. And the result would be that Noskov would relate the story of his father's orgies with the deacon's widow. Possibly, too, Noskov had friends who were as blackguardly as himself, and they might try to avenge him. At any rate, he could not leave him without retaliating.

The night was growing more and more chilly and the hand which held his revolver was aching with cold. It was a long way to the police station and of course everyone there would be asleep. Yakov sniffed angrily, not knowing what to decide, and regretting that he had not at once shot this thick-set youth whose legs were as bent as if he had spent his whole life sitting astride a barrel. And then he suddenly caught a sentence which struck him by its unexpectedness.

"I tell you straight out, although it is a secret," said Noskov, who was still attending to his leg, "I am here to be useful to you and to watch your workmen. I purposely said I wanted to give you a fright, but as a matter of fact there was a man I had to catch, only unfortunately I made a mistake. . . ."

"The devil!" said Yakov. "And why were you after him?"

"It is like this. You don't know about it, but the Socialists are in the habit of meeting in the bath-house belonging to the deacon's widow, and are again talking about a rising and reading books. . . ."

"You lie," said Yakov quietly, though he really believed him. "Who are the people who go there?"

"That I can't say. You'll find out when they are arrested."

Noskov rose to his feet by holding on to the boards of the palings.

"Give me my stick," he implored. "I can't get on without it."

Yakov bent down, picked up his stick, and gave it to him. Then he looked round and said in a low voice:

"But how was it you threw yourself upon me then?"

"I didn't mean to. I made a mistake. It was someone

else I wanted, not you. You let this matter drop. It was a mistake. You will soon see that I'm speaking the truth. You must give me some money to have my leg attended to. That's all. . . ."

And supporting himself on his bow legs by means of the palings on one side and a stick on the other, Noskov moved slowly away from the kitchen-gardens in the direction of the dark houses on the outskirts of the town, seeming to disperse the cold shadows of the clouds as he went along. After he had gone ten yards he called out softly:

"Yakov Pyetrovich!"

Yakov went very quickly up to him, and Noskov said:

"Not a word about this to anyone! Otherwise . . . you understand."

He waved his stick and went on, leaving Yakov in a state of stupefaction. There was a great deal young Artamonov had to think over at once. For one thing, he must immediately decide whether he had taken the proper course. If Noskov were really engaged in watching the Socialists, he was, of course, more than useful. He was indispensable. But supposing, on the other hand, this were all a hoax to gain time, and later on he were to revenge himself for failing in his enterprise and for being shot. When he said that he had made a mistake, and that his object had been to give Yakov a fright, he had been lying. That was quite clear. But had he perhaps been bribed by the workmen to murder him? Among the weavers at the factory, there was a large group of rowdy and insolent men, but it was hard to imagine any Socialists among them. Most of the respectable workmen, like Syedov, Krikunov, Maslov, and others, had of their own accord lately been requesting the office to dismiss one of the most persistent disturbers of the peace. No, Noskov had probably deceived him. Ought he to tell this story to Miron?

Yakov could not imagine what would happen if he told Miron about Noskov. His cousin would naturally begin questioning him in detail, like a judge, to find out what his accusation against Noskov was, and would be sure to make fun of him in one way or another. If Noskov were a spy, Miron

was probably aware of the fact. And lastly, it was not altogether clear who had made the mistake, Noskov or himself. Noskov said :

“ You will soon see that I am speaking the truth.”

He gazed after the huntsman until he disappeared in the darkness of the night. It all seemed so simple and easy to understand—Noskov had attacked him with the obvious intention of robbing him, and he had fired at Noskov. But that had only been the beginning of something as alarmingly intricate as a bad dream. There was something unusual in the way Noskov was walking along beside the palings, something unusual about the shadows which were creeping after him like dense masses of rags. It was the first time that Yakov had ever seen shadows following a man in such a sinister way.

Absorbed in his thoughts and utterly wearied by them, young Artamonov decided to wait and say nothing. But he could not stop thinking about Noskov. He felt ill and went about with knitted brows, and at dinner-time when the workmen came out of the factory, he stood watching them at the office window and tried to guess which one of them was a Socialist. Could it possibly be the stoker Vaska, a lame and slovenly fellow who had learnt the art of composing clever sarcastic little songs from Seraphim the carpenter ?

A few days later young Artamonov was exercising a horse which had stood too long in the stables, when he caught sight of Nyestyerenko, the gendarme, at the edge of the forest. He was dressed in a leather jacket and long boots, held a gun in his hand, and had a game-bag stuffed full of birds at his side. He was standing with his face towards the forest and his back towards the road, and his hands were raised to his face as he bent his head down in the act of lighting a cigarette. In the sunlight his red leather back seemed to be made of iron. Yakov at once made up his mind what to do, and riding up to him, gave him a hurried greeting :

“ I didn’t know you were here ! ”

“ This is the third day, and my wife is getting steadily worse, my friend ! ”

Nyestyerenko communicated this melancholy piece of information in a very animated tone of voice, adding directly afterwards, as he slapped his game-bag :

"Look at this ! Not bad, is it ?"

"Do you know Noskov, the huntsman ?" asked Yakov in a low voice.

The officer's red eyebrows lifted in surprise and his Chinese moustache twitched slightly. Holding on to one side of it, he blinked and looked up at the sky, from all of which Yakov guessed that he was going to tell him a lie.

"How should I ? Noskov ? Who is he ?"

"A huntsman. A man with curly hair and bow legs. . . ."

"Is he ? I seem to have seen someone like him in the forest. He had a very poor gun, hadn't he ?"

The officer was now gazing into Yakov's face with a steady, questioning expression in his grey eyes, which had a bright sparkle in the centre of their pupils. Yakov quickly told him his story about Noskov, and Nyestyerenko, who was hammering a fir-cone into the ground with the butt-end of his gun, listened with downcast eyes.

"Why didn't you report it to the police ?" he asked without raising his eyes, as soon as Yakov had finished. "That's their job, and it was your duty to report it."

"But, as I tell you, he seems to be spying on the workmen, and that is your job.<sup>1</sup> . . ."

"I suppose it is," said the gendarme, putting out his cigarette against the barrel of his gun. Once more he looked straight into Yakov's face through his half-closed eyes, and then said something in an insinuating tone which was not altogether intelligible. The gist of it, however, was that Yakov had broken the law in hiding an attempted robbery from the police, but that it was now too late to report it.

"If you had taken him to the police station at the time, it would have been a simpler matter ! Though not quite

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the ordinary police, in nearly every Russian provincial town there was at least one gendarme, usually a non-commissioned officer, whose duty it was to keep a watch on political opinion and inform against those guilty of political offences.

simple even then. But now how are you going to prove that he attacked you? You say you wounded him? Bah! It is possible to shoot a man through fright, or carelessness, or by accident. . . ."

Yakov was aware that Nyeſtyerenko was craftily trying to confuse him, and even to frighten him, so as to draw his attention away from this incident. And when the officer mentioned the possibility of shooting a man from fright, his suspicions were confirmed.

"He is lying," he thought to himself.

"Yes, my friend, the goose will certainly get into trouble for giving himself out as a spy. We'll ask him what he knows."

And laying his hand on Yakov's shoulder, he said:

"Look here. You must give me your word of honour to keep this between you and me. It is in your own interests, you understand? So will you give me your word?"

"Of course I will."

"You won't say anything about this to your uncle or to Miron Alexeyevich, will you—that is, if you really haven't told them already? Well, that's all right, we'll leave them to draw their own conclusions. Not a sound to anyone! Do you understand? The huntsman wounded himself. You had nothing to do with it."

Yakov smiled. This was a different person speaking to him, a gay, good-natured man.

"Good-bye," said the gendarme. "Remember, you have given your word of honour!"

Young Artamonov returned home somewhat soothed. That evening his uncle suggested his making a journey to the town, and he set off with pleasure, returning in eight days' time to sit at dinner with his uncle and listen to Miron with renewed anxiety.

"Nyeſtyerenko turns out not to be such an idle fellow as I thought he was. He has succeeded in catching three men even in the town—Modestov, the school-teacher, and two others!"

"Any of our own men?" asked Yakov.

"Yes. Syedov, Kirkunov, Abramov and five younger

fellows. Although it was the gendarmes from the provincial town who came to arrest them, it was really Nyeftyerenko's doing. His wife's illness has certainly been of great use to us. No, he isn't stupid by any means. He is afraid they'll brain him."

"They have stopped murdering people now," remarked Alexei.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Miron. "There has been another arrest in the town, a huntsman. . . ."

"Noskov?" asked Yakov in a low, frightened voice.

"I don't know. This man has been living with the deacon's widow. It is in her bath-house that these revolutionaries have been holding their meetings. Your father has been going to her house and amusing himself with her, as you know. A coincidence which looks bad. . . ."

"Yes, it does," said Alexei, shaking his bald head. "What is to be done with him?"

The light went out of Yakov's eyes and he could not listen any longer to what his uncle and cousin were saying. So Noskov had been arrested! It was evident that he too was a Socialist, not a robber, and had received orders from the workmen to murder their master or knock him senseless—those very workmen whom he, Yakov, considered to be the quietest and most reliable. There was Syedov, always so cleanly dressed and no longer very young, the gay, good-mannered locksmith Krikunov, and that pleasant fellow Abramov, who sang and was so clever with his hands. It was impossible to imagine that these men were his enemies too.

He also thought that his uncle's house was noisier and more frivolous than ever these days. Doctor Yakovlyev, with the gold tooth, who never had anything good to say about anything or anybody, but merely laughed and looked out upon the world through distant, hostile eyes, had become still more conspicuous. He had a menacing way of rustling newspapers.

"Yes," he would say, displaying his gleaming teeth, "we are stirring, we are waking up. The workpeople are becoming like a lazy servant girl who has discovered that her master is

unexpectedly returning home, and in her anxiety not to be dismissed, she hurriedly sweeps and cleans out of sheer fright and tries to get his neglected house in order."

"What you say is ambiguous, Doctor," Miron would observe with a frown. "That's where your lawlessness, your scepticism, show themselves."

But the doctor would only go on talking more loudly than ever. His harangues were growing longer and his words filled Yakov with alarm. Everyone appeared to be afraid of something. People kept threatening each other with misfortunes and exaggerating their mutual fears, until it was almost possible to believe that they were afraid of their own actions, ideas, and words. Yakov attributed this to the general increase in stupidity. He lived among very real fears himself, not among imaginary ones, and on his skin he could feel the noose that had been flung round his neck—a noose which, though it was invisible, was all the time growing tighter and dragging him on towards great and inevitable disaster.

His fear increased still more in two months' time, when Noskov again appeared in the town, and Abramov, yellow, thin and smooth-shaven, presented himself at the factory.

"Will you take on an old hand?" he asked with a smile, and Yakov dared not refuse him.

"It was a hard life in prison, wasn't it?" he asked.

"It was very crowded," replied Abramov, always with the same smile on his face. "If typhoid had not come to the help of the authorities, I don't know where they would have put us all."

"Yes," thought Yakov, as he saw the weaver off, "you are smiling, but I know what you are thinking about."

That same evening Miron made an outrageous scene over Abramov. In fact he almost gave Yakov a scolding, and even went so far as to stamp his foot at him, as though he were a waiter.

"You are mad," he screamed, and his nose reddened with rage. "You must dismiss him to-morrow."

A few days later, as he was taking his morning bathe in



the Oka, he was caught unawares by Lieutenant Mavrin and Nyestyerenko, who came up to him in a boat with fishing-rods sticking out of it like whiskers. The cold-blooded Lieutenant merely greeted Yakov with a careless nod and went off at once to the middle of the river, but Nyestyerenko stayed and began to undress. "It was a pity you didn't take Abramov back," he said softly. "I am very sorry I could not tell you in time."

"It was Miron's doing," muttered Yakov, conscious that the officer's breath smelt strongly of alcohol.

"Was it?" asked Nyestyerenko. "You were not responsible for it?"

"No."

"It's a pity it happened. That fellow might have been useful as a decoy, a bait."

The officer was naked now and the sun was gilding his skin, making it gleam like the scales of a carp. Looking at Yakov with the expression of an accomplice, he asked again:

"And your friend the huntsman—have you seen him?"

He gave a soft little laugh of self-satisfaction.

"Do you know," he went on, "that they had induced him to hunt you? He wanted to buy a double-barrelled gun. It is always passions, passions, my friend, which are the people's guide! He'll be a lot of use now, that huntsman, because I've got him firmly by the throat, thanks to the mistake he made about you."

"What mistake? When you say that . . ."

"It was a mistake, sir, a mistake!" repeated the officer persistently, and splashing his hand in the water, he crossed his bare breast and strode off into the river like a horse.

"The devil take the lot of you!" thought Yakov gloomily.

Suddenly death came, and its coming was like shutting the door of a room where a noise has been going on.

In the middle of the night Yakov was awakened by his mother.

"Get up at once," she sobbed. "Tikhon has ridden over to say that Uncle Alexei is dead!"

Yakov sprang up.

"How has it happened?" he muttered. "He was not even ill surely. . . ."

His father staggered in at the door, breathing painfully.

"Tikhon," he muttered. "Don't expect good news where Tikhon is! There, you see, Yakov! Suddenly. . . ."

He stood barefoot with a dressing-gown flung over his night attire, pulling his ear and looking about him as if he were in some strange place.

"*Ukh*," he kept moaning.

"How did it happen?" asked Yakov in bewilderment.

"He died impenitent," said his mother, who looked like an enormous sack of flour.

They drove off in a britzka. Yakov occupied the coachman's seat and watched Tikhon bobbing up and down in front of him on a horse, while his shadow danced and spread itself over the road, as if it were trying to bury itself in the ground.

Olga met them in the court-yard. She was walking to and fro between the shed and the yard gate, dressed in the white petticoat and blouse which made up her night attire. She seemed blue and transparent in the moonlight, and it was strange to see her figure casting a deep shadow upon the bare cobble-stones in the yard. "This is the end of my life," she said quietly. Kuchum, a black dog, who refused to be separated from her, was walking behind her.

Huddled up on a bench beneath the kitchen window sat Miron. He was holding a lighted cigarette in one hand and swinging his spectacles in the other, making the lenses gleam and fine threads of gold glisten in the air. His nose looked bigger than ever without spectacles. Yakov sat down silently beside him, but Artamonov stood in the middle of the court-yard, gazing at an open window like a beggar waiting for alms, while Olga looked at the sky and talked to Natalya in a high-pitched voice.

"I didn't notice when. . . . Suddenly his dear shoulder became deadly cold and his dear mouth opened. The darling hadn't even time to say a last word to me. He was complaining yesterday that his heart was hurting him."

Olga was telling her story quietly and her words as well as her figure seemed to cast a shadow.

Miron's cigarette had gone out, and throwing it away he butted his head into Yakov's shoulder and cried softly :

"Y-you don't know how good he was. . . ."

"What is to be done ?" replied Yakov, unable to think of anything else. He ought to say something to his aunt, but what ? And he remained gazing at the ground and scraping it with his foot in silence.

With a grunt Artamonov went cautiously into the house and Yakov followed him on tiptoe. His uncle lay covered by a sheet. The knotted handkerchief which was tied round his jaw stuck out like horns from his head, and his big toes stretched the sheet so tightly that they seemed to be trying to burst their way through. The waning moon looked brightly in at the window and the muslin curtains swayed gently. Kuchum was howling in the court-yard and, as if in answer to him, Artamonov crossed himself with a bold gesture and said in an unnecessarily loud voice :

"He had an easy life and an easy death."

From the window Yakov saw that Vera Popova, dressed all in black like a nun, was now walking at his aunt's side, and Olga was telling her story again in a high-pitched voice :

"He died in his sleep. . . ."

"Don't be a fool !" exclaimed Vyalov softly. He was rubbing the horse down with a handful of hay and shaking his head to prevent it from seizing his ears between its lips. Artamonov also looked out of the window.

"There is that fool screaming," he muttered ; "he does not understand a thing."

"One oughtn't to talk," thought Yakov, and going out on to the steps, he began to watch the women's shadows—one of them was in black and the other in white—sweeping the dust away from the stones, which were becoming brighter and brighter. His mother was whispering to Tikhon, who was nodding assent, as was also the horse which had a copper-coloured spot in its eye. Then Artamonov came out of the house and Natalya said to him :

"You ought to send a telegram to Nikita Ilyich. Tikhon knows where he is."

"Tikhon knows, does he!" repeated Artamonov angrily. "Send for him, Miron."

Miron got up, knocked his shoulder against the doorpost as he went off, and stroked the post with his hand.

"Send one to Ilya, too," Artamonov called after him. From a dark hole which had been cut through the wall, Miron replied:

"Ilya can't come."

"I have lived with him for thirty years, you know," said Olga, as if she was even surprised herself at what she was saying. "And before we were married we were friends for four years. What will become of me now?"

Artamonov went up to Yakov.

"Where is Ilya?"

"I don't know."

"You are lying, aren't you?"

"This isn't the time to talk about Ilya, *Papasha*."

Doctor Yakovlyev entered the court-yard hurriedly.

"In the bedroom?" he asked.

"You fool!" thought Yakov. "You won't bring him back to life."

He was oppressed by the impossibility of escaping from these hours of gloom. Everything round him was unnecessarily distressing: the people, their conversation, the bay horse polished like bronze in the moonlight, and the silent grief of this black dog. His aunt Olga seemed to him to be boasting of how happy she had been with her husband. His mother was sobbing with rather forced abandonment in a corner of the court-yard. His father's eyes were motionless and his face wooden. In fact, it was all much more painful than it should have been.

On the day of his uncle Alexei's funeral, when the coffin had already been lowered into the grave and handfuls of yellow sand thrown upon it, his uncle Nikita appeared in the cemetery.

"Here's another of them," thought Yakov, surveying the monk's angular figure as the latter leant against the trunk of a birch tree he himself had planted long ago.

"You are too late," said Artamonov as he went up to his brother, wiping the tears from his face. The monk drew his head under his hump like a tortoise. His appearance was that of a beggar. His cassock had faded in the sun, his cowl had become the colour of an old tin pail, and his boots were down at heel. His face was dusty and swollen, and he gazed with dim eyes at the backs of those who were surrounding the grave and said something in an inaudible voice to Artamonov, which made his little grey beard quiver. Yakov looked round, and from under his eyebrows saw dozens of eyes scanning the monk with curious glances, probably because people knew him to be the hunchback brother and uncle of rich men and expected a scandal of some sort. Yakov knew that the town was convinced that the Artamonovs had hidden the hunchback in a monastery so as to avail themselves of his share of their father's inheritance.

The fat, good-natured priest, Father Nikolai, was exhorting Olga in his tenor voice.

"We must not offend Our Lord God with our groans and tears, because it is His will. . . ."

"But you know I don't cry or complain," replied Olga in her high voice.

Her hands were trembling, and she was fumbling in her skirt with strange convulsive movements in her anxiety to find her pocket and hide her handkerchief, which her tears had reduced to a little wet ball.

Tikhon Vyalov skilfully assisted the keeper of the cemetery to fill up the grave, while Miron stood petrified and the hunchback monk talked in a low, mournful voice to Natalya.

"Oi, how you have changed," he said. "I shouldn't have recognized you!"

And poking his finger into the hump on his chest, he added unnecessarily:

"You couldn't help recognizing me. Is this your Yakov? And is this tall fellow Alyosha's Miron? Yes, yes, I see. Well, let us be going. . . ."

Yakov stayed behind in the cemetery, for a moment before he had caught sight of Noskov in a crowd of workmen. The

hunter had passed by with the lame stoker Vaska, and had looked into Yakov's face as he passed with an unpleasantly inquiring glance. What was in the fellow's mind? His intentions towards the man who had shot him, and might have killed him, could not, of course, be innocent.

Tikhon came up, brushing the sand from his overcoat with his hand.

"Look how Alexei Ilyich always exerted himself," he said, "and yet. . . . While Nikita Ilyich, who is a weakling. . . ."

"There is a. . . ." said Yakov suddenly and then broke off his sentence.

"What?"

"The workmen are sorry for my uncle."

"And why not?"

"There is a man here called Noskov, a huntsman," began Yakov once more. "I ought to have told you about him. . . ."

"One is even sorry when a horse dies," said Tikhon thoughtfully. "Alexei Ilyich was always on the go and died as quickly as he lived—just as if he had given himself a blow. Only the day before he died, he said to me. . . ."

Yakov relapsed into silence, realizing that his words were beyond the reach of Tikhon's intelligence. He decided to tell him about Noskov, because it was essential to tell someone, for he found that thinking about him was more depressing than anything else at the moment. Only the day before this bow-legged fellow with his stupid soldier's face had appeared round a corner and come up to him in the town.

"You owe me a little debt," he had said, taking off his cap and keeping his eye fixed on the lining. "You promised to give me something for having my leg attended to. Besides, since your uncle has died, you may look upon it as a prayer for his soul. And I have the chance of buying a remarkably good concertina which will console your father."

Yakov looked at him in amazement and said nothing. Then Noskov added with polite persistence:

"And as I serve your interests against the enemies of Russia. . . ."

"How much do you want?" asked Yakov.

"Thirty-five roubles," replied Noskov after a pause.

Yakov gave him the money and went off quickly, feeling perturbed and frightened. "He considers I'm a fool," he thought. "He thinks I'm afraid of him, the scoundrel! No, you wait. . . ."

And now, as he walked slowly home, Yakov could think of nothing else but how to get rid of this man, who undoubtedly wanted to bring him under the hatchet like an ox.

The noisy hours of the funeral feast dragged on interminably. People amused themselves by making the deacon Kartsov and the choir sing "Eternal Rest" in memory of the dead man. Zhiteikin had drunk so much that he began waving a fork in the air and singing in an unbecoming and menacing manner :

"Tales the champion warriors tell  
Of fights together fought, and well."

Styepan Barski was loud in his praises of Artamonov while his body, which was as soft as a down pillow, was being squeezed into his carriage.

"Well, Pyotr Ilyich, you indeed loved your brother! I shan't forget a funeral feast like this for a long time!"

Artamonov was drunk and Yakov heard his cross and jeering reply :

"You'll soon forget everything, because you'll burst."

Artamonov had invited Zhiteikin, Barski, Voroponov, and a few more respected townspeople against Miron's wishes, and the latter was evidently upset at their coming, for he had not sat at the banqueting table for more than half an hour before he got up and strode out like a crane. Olga slipped out unobserved after him, and later on the monk retired too, apparently wearied by the questions put to him by half-drunken men about the monastic life. Artamonov behaved as if he wanted to offend everyone present, and all the time the feast lasted Yakov was waiting for a quarrel to break out between his father and the townspeople.

Natalya, offended at the way Popova was waiting on Olga, pouted and went home, but Artamonov for some reason was

anxious to spend the night in Alexei's study, which all seemed to Yakov absurdly fantastic and unnecessary, and upset him still more. After lying down on a sofa for two hours and waiting in vain to go to sleep, he went out into the court-yard, and seated next to Tikhon on the bench beneath the kitchen window saw the black figure of the monk looking like a piece of broken machinery. He was smaller and broader without a cowl over his bald head, and his must-coloured face looked like a child's. He held a glass in his hand and beside him on the bench stood a bottle of kvass.

"Who is there?" he asked softly, and at once answered his own question. "It's Yasha. Come and join the old men, Yasha!"

And holding up his glass against the moon, he looked at the cloudy liquid in it. The moon had hidden itself behind the belfry, bathing it in misty silver light and bringing it out in strong relief against the warm darkness of the night. Above the belfry were clouds which looked like dirty patches neatly sewn into blue velvet. Alexei's favourite animal, Kuchum, a dog with a large muzzle, was walking thoughtfully about the yard, sniffing the ground as he went along, and as he sniffed he suddenly raised his head towards the sky and uttered a low, questioning howl.

"Hush, Kuchum," said Tikhon in an undertone.

The dog came up to him, pushed his massive head between Tikhon's knees, and whined.

"He realizes," remarked Yakov. The others did not answer, but he very much wanted to talk so as to prevent himself from thinking.

"He understands, I say," he repeated perseveringly.

"And why shouldn't he?" exclaimed the *dvornik* softly.

"The monastery dog in Suzdal used to recognize thieves by their smell," said the monk reminiscently.

"What have you been talking about?" asked Yakov. The monk, having finished his kvass, wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his cassock and began a toothless mumble which sounded like someone shuffling downstairs:

"Tikhon here notices that the people are inclined to riot



again. It looks very much like it. They are all very thoughtful."

"They are exhausted by work," put in Tikhon, who was playing with the dog's ears.

"Send the dog away," ordered Yakov. "It is full of fleas."

The *dvornik* took Kuchum's paws from his knees and pushed him away with his foot. But the animal only put his tail between his legs and, sitting down, gave two melancholy barks. Three people were watching him, and it flashed through the mind of one of them that Tikhon and the monk were possibly far more sorry for the orphaned dog than for his master who lay buried in the ground.

"There will be a rising," said Yakov, and he peered cautiously into the dark corners of the yard. "Do you remember the arrest of Syedov and his friends, Tikhon?"

"Of course, I do."

The monk pulled a little tin box from the pocket of his cassock and took a pinch of snuff out of it.

"You see, I take snuff," he informed his nephew. "It helps my eyes. My sight has become bad."

He sneezed and went on:

"They are making arrests even in the villages."

"There are a great number of spies about," said Yakov, trying to talk simply.

"Everybody is being watched."

"If you don't watch," muttered Tikhon, "you won't find out anything."

And Yakov, who was rolling his tongue round irresolutely and shivering, either from fear or because of the cool night air, said almost in a whisper:

"There are spies even amongst us. There are some unpleasant rumours about Noskov the huntsman. It may have been he who reported Syedov and all those men in the town."

"*Isb*, you fool," exclaimed Tikhon after a pause, stretching out his hand to the dog and immediately dropping it again on his knee. Yakov felt that these words were idly spoken

and had no special significance, but for some reason he gave Tikhon a warning.

"Don't talk about Noskov," he said.

"Why should I? He is nothing to me. And even if one does talk, nobody believes in anyone else."

"That's true," said the monk. "There is little belief in anything. After the war I talked to some wounded soldiers and found that not even soldiers believed in war! It is an iron age, Yasha. Everywhere there is iron and machinery! Machinery works and sings and speaks! But we must have a different kind of people for this iron factory of a world—an iron people. There are a great many people who realize this; I have met some of them. 'We'll show you softies a thing or two,' they say. Others, on the other hand, take offence. They are accustomed to receiving orders from a man, but when a metal like iron gives them orders they take it as an insult! They are accustomed to axes and hammers and all the tools they can take up in their hands, but in machinery they are presented with a thing weighing nearly two tons and yet very much alive."

Tikhon grunted, and gave a laugh inaudible to Yakov and therefore unsuspected by him.

"They are putting the cart before the horse," he said. "*Ekh*, the devils!"

"And many people are exasperated," continued the monk very quietly. "For three years I went about everywhere and saw how exasperated they were. And their irritation was unreasonable. They were irritated with one another, but they were all equally to blame, both for their intelligence and their stupidity. That was what Father Glyeb told me, and he was quite right!"

"Is he still alive?" asked Tikhon.

"He is no longer a priest," replied Nikita. "He has given it up, and now sells books at country fairs."

"He was a good priest," said Tikhon. "I used to go to him for confession. A good man. He only pretended to be a priest because he was poor. He did not really believe in God, so I thought."

"No, he believed in Christ. Each man has his own way of believing."

"Which leads to confusion," said Tikhon firmly, and again he smiled unpleasantly. "It is the result of too much thinking. . . ."

Artamonov came noiselessly out to the front steps, barefooted and in his night attire, and looked up at the pale sky.

"I can't sleep," he said to the men beneath the window. The dog is disturbing me. And you growling away there. . . ."

The dog, who was sitting in the middle of the court-yard with his ears pricked up, was whining and gazing at the dark hole formed by an open window, waiting, no doubt, for his master to call him.

"Tikhon, you are always repeating your own maxims," began Artamonov. "You see, Yakov, the peasants are obsessed with one idea, and that is—how the wolf fell into the trap. Your brother was just the same. Nikita, do you know about Ilya?"

"Yes, I have heard."

"I sent him away. He jumped on a borrowed horse and rode off, but where did he go? Of course, it isn't everyone who can turn his back on riches as he has done, and live goodness knows how. . . ."

"Alexei was a god-fearing man too," said Nikita quietly.

Artamonov raised his hand to his temple without a word and went off into the garden, after telling Yakov to bring him a blanket and some pillows in the summer-house.

"Perhaps I shall go to sleep there."

He was almost terrifying with his heavy frame, all swathed in white, his tousled hair, and bloated dark-brown face.

"What you said about machinery, Nikita, was all nonsense," he said, stopping in the middle of the court-yard. "What do you know about machinery? Your business is to talk about God. Machinery does not prevent. . . ."

Tikhon cut him short with disrespectful obstinacy.

"Machinery makes dearer living and more noise."

Artamonov waved him away and went off into the garden,

and Yakov walked in front of him with the pillows, his mind full of angry, gloomy thoughts.

"What are relations like my father and uncle to me? They can't help me."

Artamonov did not invite his brother to live with him, and the monk established himself in the attic of Olga's house.

"I'll only stay a little while," he told her. "I shall soon go away."

He lived there almost unnoticed, and unless he were called downstairs never went down to the living-rooms. He potted about the garden, cut withered branches from the trees, and crept about the ground like a tortoise while he pulled up weeds. He was withered and shrunken in body, and he talked to people in a low voice, as if he were telling them some important secrets. He was unwilling to go to church, excusing himself on the plea of ill-health, and at home prayed but little, disliked talking about God, and obstinately avoided all such conversations.

Yakov saw that he had made great friends with Olga and was much respected by silent Vera Popova. And even Miron listened to the monk's stories about his wanderings and the people he had met without a frown, although he had become colder and more arrogant than ever since his father's death, and would give orders in the factory as if he were the eldest, and scold Yakov like a servant.

The monk looked at the broad expanse of Natalya's red face with the same affection as he looked at everything and everybody, but he talked less to her than to the others, and even she gradually forgot how to talk and merely breathed. There was a fixed look in her dulled eyes, and only on rare occasions was their dimness lighted up by anxiety about her husband's health, fear of Miron, or loving pleasure at the sight of fat and sedate Yakov. With Tikhon the monk was not altogether on good terms. They grumbled at each other, and, though they did not quarrel, they passed each other by like two blind men.

His uncle's angular black figure cast yet another shadow over Yakov's life, for the sight of him called up gloomy fore-

bodings, and his dark wasted face forced the younger man to think about death. Yakov Artamonov viewed everything that was done at home from the lofty standpoint of his own troubles; but although these troubles were continually on the increase, fresh anxieties were constantly arising at home. Experienced as he was in love-affairs, his masculine instinct kept telling him that Polina was growing colder towards him, and his suspicions were confirmed by the behaviour of cold-blooded Lieutenant Mavrin. Nowadays when the lieutenant met him, he only touched his cap with a disdainful finger, and screwed his eyes up as if he were examining some very small object in the distance; whereas before he had been amiable and polite, and more than once at a public meeting, when he had either borrowed money from Yakov for a game of cards, or requested that he might defer payment of his debt, he had said with approval:

"You have the figure of an artilleryman, Artamonov."

Or he had made some other pleasant remark. Yakov had been flattered by the rough good-nature of this officer, who seemed to be made of india-rubber and who astonished the whole town by his contempt of the cold, his skill, strength, and the desperate bravery which was undoubtedly concealed in his character. He looked into people's faces with round, stony eyes and spoke in rather a hoarse, imperious voice.

"I am a cold-blooded man," he would say, "and I can't endure exaggeration."

Having quarrelled at cards with the postmaster Dronov, who, though ill and old, was feared by everyone in the town on account of his spiteful temper, Mavrin had said to him:

"I am not going to exaggerate, but you are an old fool!"

Now that he suspected him of being his rival, Yakov Artamonov was afraid of a collision with him, but it did not occur to him to give up Polina, whom he was beginning to find more and more attractive. Still, he had already given her more than one warning.

"Take care!" he had said. "If I notice anything between you and Mavrin, I shall throw you over!"

Besides this was the increasing anxiety caused him by Nos-

kov, the huntsman. Noskov would lie in wait for him near the little bridge over the Vataraksha on the outskirts of the town, and suddenly rise up out of the ground and persist in asking for money as though it were his due, keeping his eyes fixed on his cap.

There was something extraordinarily unpleasant about the fact that the huntsman always appeared in the same spot, emerging from among nettles and burdocks and the thick undergrowth of weeds which grew between two bent willows. A house belonging to a market-gardener called Pamphil had stood there two years ago. But the market-gardener had been murdered, his house set on fire, the willows burnt, and the clayey soil mixed with charcoal and ashes had been assiduously trampled down by people playing skittles. Among the remains of the brick foundations stood the stove with its chimney sticking up in the air, and above this on clear nights a greenish star could be seen twinkling low in the sky. Noskov would rustle slowly through the nettles and emerge from behind the chimney.

"I'll make it worth your while," he would mutter, slowly pulling off his cap. "There is another set of . . . assembling here . . ."

"These sets are not my business," Yakov would say angrily. He could hear the open effrontery in Noskov's reply :

"Of course you don't organize, but it is a matter which concerns you all the same."

"What a pity I did not shoot him then and there !" regretted Yakov for the tenth time.

"You must be more careful, do you see ?" he would say, giving the spy some money.

"I know."

"Mind you don't get me into trouble."

"Why should I ? Set your mind at rest."

"Yes, of course he considers me a fool. . . ."

While realizing his usefulness, Yakov Artamonov was sure that this youth with his bow legs and flat face could not do otherwise than avenge himself for the shot. He certainly wanted to do so. Either Noskov would give him a fright or he would bribe some workmen with money, which he himself

had given, and order them to murder him. Already, so it seemed to Yakov, there was more intentness and malice in the looks which the workmen cast at him.

Miron kept saying more and more frequently that the work-people were rebelling, not in order to better their condition, but because they happened to be inspired with the highly absurd and senseless idea that they must take the banks and factories, and the general management of the country into their own hands. Whenever he talked about this he drew himself up to his full height and strode up and down the room on his long legs. Now and then, too, he twisted his neck round and slipped a finger behind his collar, although his neck was thin and his shirt-collar fairly large.

"It isn't even Socialism. The devil only knows what it is! And here is your own brother appearing as a supporter of this invention. Our government of old crows . . ."

Yakov realized that Miron was saying all this in order to convince his listeners and himself of his right to a place in the Imperial Duma; but nevertheless his cousin's angry speeches left Yakov with an undercurrent of fear, and strengthened his consciousness of his own defencelessness amongst hundreds of workmen. Once he even experienced something akin to a paroxysm of terror. He was aroused one morning by groans and cries in the court-yard of the factory, and raising his head from his pillow he saw the shadows of a turbulent crowd running along the smooth white wall of a warehouse. They were jumping up and down and waving their arms about, and it seemed as if the whole building were moving along the ground. Suddenly perspiration broke out all over him and in his imagination he screamed as he thought:

"A rebellion!"

The stream of shadows, more terrible for some reason than real people, soon disappeared, and Yakov realized that the usual Monday brawl had just taken place at the factory gates—there was nearly always a brawl after a holiday—still the eerie race run by these dark groaning shadows remained imprinted on his memory. Life in general was becoming so full of alarms that it was unpleasant to see the newspaper, and he

had no wish to read it. Simplicity and serenity were disappearing, while unpleasantness loomed large on every hand and fresh people kept appearing on the scene.

His sister Tatyana suddenly brought her future husband home from Vorgorod, a thin little man who wore an engineer's cap on his red hair. He was light and nimble on his feet and very gay, and, being two years younger than Tatyana, everyone in the house followed her example and called him Mitya. He played the guitar and sang songs, though one of them, which he sang specially often, seemed to Yakov an insult to his sister and very much upset his mother :

"Dead in her grave my dear wife lies—  
Receive her, Lord, in Paradise !"

But Tatyana was not offended. She, like everyone else, was amused at him, and even Natalya would often say to him fondly :

"*Akh*, you little siskin ! You know how to sing, you harlequin !"

Mitya could go on eating interminably, like a pigeon. The elder Artamonov would stare at him in astonishment, as if in a dream, then blink and inquire :

"Judging by your capacity for eating, you ought to drink. Do you ?"

"I can," replied his son-in-law, and at supper he proved that he could also drink a good deal. He had been everywhere, on the Volga, in the Urals, the Crimea and the Caucasus, and knew countless numbers of amusing sayings, stories, and funny expressions. He seemed to have escaped from some gay and careless country.

"Life is a beautiful woman," he would say. He slipped at once into the ever-revolving circle of the business and was liked by the workmen and laughed at by the young people. The old weavers nodded their heads affectionately at him, and even Miron licked his smiles away from his thin lips with his tongue as he listened to his sparkling conversation.

Here he is, walking by Miron's side through the factory court-yard towards the fifth block. This block, the fifth finger



in the red brick paw, only hugs the ground as yet. It stands enveloped in scaffolding, on the platforms of which carpenters are busy at work, axes gleam like silver, and gold and glass glitter in Miron's spectacles. The latter stretches out his arm like a general in some worthless old picture, and Mitya nods his head and he, too, waves his arms as if he were throwing something on the ground.

Yakov looks at them from the office window. He also likes his brother-in-law, because he radiates cheerfulness and makes him forget the many things which weigh upon his mind. He even envies Mitya's temperament, but feels a strange distrust of him. He will not be here long, Yakov thinks—till to-morrow, perhaps—but after that he will give himself out as an actor or a hairdresser, or disappear as suddenly as he came. Mitya has another good quality. He is not apparently avaricious. He does not ask how much Tatyana's dowry is, though perhaps this is due to some secret stratagem of hers. Still her father grumbles whenever he is sober :

"So it is a carrotty fellow like this that I have been toiling for ! "

Miron also married.

"Allow me to present my wife to you," he said on his arrival from Moscow, bringing forward a plump blue-eyed doll with curly hair and her head on one side. She was modelled on the diminutive scale of a toy, but with an exactness which, in Yakov's eyes, made her look, not like a real woman, but like the little china figure on his uncle Alexei's favourite clock—the head of the figure had been broken off and stuck on a little to one side. The clock stood on a console-table and the statuette had its back to the room and faced the looking-glass. Miron announced that his wife's name was Anna and that she was eighteen, but said nothing about the fact that with her he had received a quarter of a million roubles, and that she was the only daughter of a paper manufacturer.

"Look at the marriages they are making ! " grumbled Artamonov, looking at Yakov with red eyes. "And the devil only knows whom you are keeping company with ! And Ilya has been swept out of the house like dust."

Artamonov had difficulty in walking and his flabby, withered frame swayed as he went along. He seemed to Yakov to be irritated by his bodily infirmity, and to show off the depressing ugliness of his naked old age on purpose. He paraded about with his bloated-looking chest uncovered, dressed in his night-attire, a dressing-gown without a girdle, and slippers on his bare feet, just as he had done before his daughter Yelena in order to irritate her. Sometimes he appeared in the office and remained for a long time, hindering Yakov, and complaining that he had found no pleasure at all in devoting all his powers to the factory and his children and spending his whole life amid a smoky round of worries, harnessed between the stone shafts of his business.

Yakov listened without uttering a word, for he saw that these complaints were a comfort to his father and made him expand and grow till he reached the proportions of a belfry, which the sun sees in the morning before it catches a glimpse of people's houses, and to which it bids a last farewell as it departs at night. Still, he drew an instructive inference from these grumbles, namely, that to live as his father had done was absurd.

He always noticed that after sating himself with complaints Artamonov was seized with a burning itch to wound people and make fools of them. He would go to his old wife as she sat by the window looking out on to the garden, with her useless hands lying in her lap and her vacant eyes fixed on one point, and, seating himself at her side, begin to nag at her.

"What are you thinking about?" he would say. "You are fat but not conspicuous. The children don't see you. Tatyana speaks more kindly to the cook than she does to you, and Yelena has forgotten you. She never comes home, does she? She has evidently picked up a new sweetheart again. And Ilya—where is he?"

But it was dull teasing his wife. Her purple face was soon streaming with tears, which seemed not only to flow from her eyes, but to gush out of every pore in her tightly blown-out cheeks and porous double chin and to ooze out from somewhere near her ears.

"You have sprung a leak and the water is running out," the old man would mutter disdainfully and go off, fanning her away like smoke. No, she was not amusing.

Yakov he did not tease, although his son always thought that he looked at him with an air of insulting pity.

"*Ekh*, you with your vacant eyes . . ." he would sometimes sigh.

Miron was beyond the reach of raillery, and Artamonov, it was clear, kept out of his way from sheer fright. That Yakov could understand. Everyone was afraid of Miron, both at the factory and at home, from his mother and his china figure of a wife down to Grishka, the boy who opened the front door. When Miron walked through the court-yard, his long shadow seemed to create peace and quiet round him.

Artamonov found no satisfaction in laughing at his red-haired son-in-law, because Mitya knew well how to laugh at himself and obviously preferred striking a blow at himself to being struck by someone else. Tatyana, who was pregnant, would pout her lips importantly and lie down after dinner to read three books at once. Afterwards she would go for a walk, and her husband would run along at her side like a poodle.

Artamonov would order the horse to be harnessed and drive to the town for the purpose of teasing his brother and Tikhon. Yakov repeatedly heard how he did it.

"What, has the student in a cowl lost his faith in God?" he would nag at the monk.

Nikita would move his hump and stroke his pointed knees firmly with his long hands.

"*Oi*, you shouldn't talk like that," he would reply in a soft, plaintive tone.

"Why shouldn't I? You aren't wearing the right hat. That hat of yours is wrong. All your clothes are wrong. What sort of a monk are you?"

"That is my own affair."

"You take snuff. No, you have wasted your time. You have made a mistake. You ought long ago to have married a poor girl, an orphan. She would have gratefully borne you

children, and you would now be a grandfather like me. But you allowed . . . do you remember ? ”

The monk would slowly creep away like an enormous tortoise, and Pyotr Ilyich Artamonov would go to Olga and tell her stories about Alexei's revels and about the fair. But he did not find this amusing either. The little old woman had grown fidgety since her husband's death, and was always going about moving the furniture and putting things first in one place, then in another, or taking peeps out of the windows. She never moved her head when she walked, and in spite of the spectacles with thick lenses which flaunted themselves upon her nose, she groped her way about with her stick tapping on the floor and her right hand stretched out in front of her. But she would reply to the old man's malicious stories with a smile :

“ Say whatever you like. You can give no fresh virtues to the Alyosha that I know, and no mud will stick on him.”

“ What he said about you was true. You only see out of one eye.”

“ I can hardly see out of either,” said Olga. “ Yesterday I smashed his favourite china mug because I am so blind.”

Artamonov did his best to tease Tikhon Vyalov, but this was not easy either. Tikhon never grew angry. He merely glanced sideways, grunted a little, and answered briefly and quietly.

“ You have lived a long time,” Artamonov would say, and Tikhon would reply, very reasonably :

“ Some people live even longer.”

“ Now what have you lived for, eh ? Tell me.”

“ Everyone has to live.”

“ True, but not everyone spends his whole life sweeping court-yards and clearing away dust.”

Tikhon had his own ideas.

“ Once a man is born, he must go on living till he dies,” he would say ; but Artamonov would continue without listening to him :

“ Here you have spent your whole life with a broom. You have neither wife nor children. You have never had worries

of any kind. Why is that? My father often offered you another post, but you did not want it. You always refused it. Why were you so obstinate?"

"It is too late to ask that now, Pyotr Ilyich," Tikhon would reply with a sidelong glance.

At this Artamonov would get angry and continue to nag at him.

"Look how many people have become rich even in your lifetime. Everyone has been struggling to get comforts and hoarding up money."

"Yes; they have hoarded and hoarded and bought the devil himself," Tikhon would say, rounding his mouth and pronouncing his "o's" with emphasis.

Yakov always expected his father to fly into a temper and abuse Tikhon, but the old man never uttered a word. He merely muttered something inarticulate and went away from the *dvornik*. In spite of losing his colour, growing bald and becoming the colour of clay all over, Tikhon did not succumb to the attacks of old age and was as strong as ever in body. He even acquired a certain beauty and talked in a more consequential and didactic tone than ever. In fact, both in speech and behaviour, he seemed to Yakov much more like an owner than his father.

As for Yakov himself, he saw more and more clearly that he was unwanted among his relations in a house where the only nice person was an outsider—Mitya Longinov. Mitya did not appear to him as either stupid or intelligent. He was beyond such considerations and quite distinct from other people. The significance of his personality was confirmed by Miron's attitude towards him. Harsh, overbearing and imperious as he was towards everyone, Miron lived on good terms with Mitya, and though he often argued he never quarrelled with him, and was cautious even in argument. In the house the same call could be heard from morning till night by different voices.

"Mitya!" Tatyana would shout.

"Where is Mitya?" Natalya would inquire, and even Artamonov would lean out of the window and bellow:

"Mitri, it is time for dinner!"

Mitya ran about the factory with the nimbleness of a fox, and skilfully swept away all traces of Miron's cold and insulting severity towards the workmen and the staff with his fluffy brush—a brush composed of droll remarks and merry little jokes. The workmen he called his friends.

"That's not right, my friend," he would say to the sedate and bearded foreman of the carpenters; and he would snatch a red leather note-book and a pencil from his pocket or draw something on a board.

"Do you see?" he would ask. "Like this. And this. There, that's it. Is that all right?"

"Quite right," the foreman would agree. "But we do everything in the old-fashioned way we are accustomed to."

"But you must get accustomed to the new way, my dear fellow. It is more paying!"

"Quite right," the foreman would agree.

Mitya resembled Alexei in the dexterous way he played with the business. Yet there was none of the owner's avarice to be seen in him, and his gaiety and drollery were strongly reminiscent of Seraphim the carpenter. Even Artamonov noticed this, and one evening at supper, after Mitya had dispelled his angry mood, he murmured with a smile:

"That's what Seraphim the Comforter used to do for us!"

On one occasion after the usual collision between his father and Miron, Yakov heard Mitya say to the latter:

"The combination of pity with terror and repulsion is the essence of Russian chemistry!"

And he at once proceeded to give comfort.

"Never mind," he said. "It will soon pass. It will die out. We shall clear ourselves of . . ."

It was the evening of a holiday.

"I have had no holidays in my life," grumbled Artamonov at tea in the garden. Whereupon his son-in-law shot up like a rocket and eloquence dropped from him like golden sand.

"That's your own fault, nothing more. A man makes arrangements for holidays. Life is a beautiful woman. It demands presents, distractions and games of every kind. We

must take pleasure in being alive. It is possible to find something to be glad about every day."

He spoke at some length with the skill of a man playing a pipe, and silence fell upon everyone at the table. It was always like that. People seemed to be sent to sleep by listening to him. Yakov was also conscious of the fascination of his talk and felt there was real truth in what he said. But the question he longed to ask Mitya was :

"Why did you marry a plain and stupid girl?"

He saw there was something artificial about Mitya's attitude towards his wife. He was too amiable, too solicitous. Yakov thought that even his sister felt this artificiality. She was melancholy, taciturn, and too easily irritated, and carried on animated conversations about politics with Miron far more often than with her gay husband—politics being the only subject she was able to talk about.

Sometimes Yakov thought that, instead of coming from a gay and care-free country, Mitya Longinov had sprung from some dull, dark pit and gone in search of people as yet unknown to him, and in his joy at having at last discovered them, he was dancing in front of them, making them laugh, and showing that he was much touched, as well as somewhat surprised, at their numbers. There was something stupid, in Yakov's eyes, about his surprise. It was like the surprise of a little boy in a toyshop, but of an intelligent little boy who is at once able to discern which are the best toys.

Of all the people in the house and at the factory there were two who definitely disliked Tatyana's husband—Nikita and Tikhon Vyalov. In answer to Yakov's question how he liked Mitya, the *dvornik* replied quietly :

"He is not to be trusted."

"Why not?"

"He is a fly. He settles on every piece of rubbish."

Yakov persisted in questioning the old man for a long time, but the latter could not tell him anything more explicit.

"You can see for yourself, Yakov Pyetrovich," he said. "Surely you can see that he is posing."

Yakov's uncle, the monk, said almost the same thing.

"He throws dust in people's eyes," he observed with a sigh. "I have seen so many eloquent speakers. They only muddle the people. And they get muddled themselves over words. If you say 'hill, oh' to him, he will answer you back with 'hillock.' . . . Yes, he will."

It was strange to hear this stunted cripple speaking in anger, almost in malice—an emotion which was completely unnatural to him. And still more astonishing was the unanimity which existed between Tikhon and Nikita in their estimate of Tatyana's husband, for the old men were usually at variance and lived in open, though silent, hostility, avoiding each other and hardly ever exchanging a word. In this Yakov saw yet another instance of the stupidity of mankind, of which he was so heartily tired. How could people live at variance when to-morrow they might be laid low in death?

His uncle Nikita was dying. It seemed to Yakov that his father was diligently helping to bring this about by trampling on the monk, and overwhelming him with reproaches almost every time they met.

"I have lived my whole life among other people like a bull, but you have lived like a tom-cat. Everyone is anxious to make you a little warmer, a little more comfortable, and they don't even seem to see that you are a hunchback. Everyone considers me bad-tempered, but how do I show my bad temper? I have spent my whole life . . ."

The monk would draw his head back under his hump.

"Don't be angry," he would implore with a little cough.

Another stumbling-block to Yakov was the repugnance inspired in him by his father and his bare chest, which was covered with musty grey hair and looked as if it were made of soap. It was a feeling difficult to hide, and now and then he had to remind himself that Artamonov was his father and that he owed his existence to him.

But this did not make Artamonov any the more attractive or stifle his son's repugnance, about which there was something even mortifying and humiliating. Nearly every day Artamonov drove to the town, as if for the express purpose of watching the monk die. He would climb laboriously up to



the attic, panting as he went, and seating himself at the monk's bedside fix his inflamed red eyes upon him. Nikita never said anything. He merely coughed from time to time and stared up at the ceiling with eyes the colour of pewter. His hands had become restless, and he kept arranging his cassock all the time and picking off invisible specks of dust. Sometimes, when out of breath with coughing, he would get up.

"Are you breaking up?" Artamonov would inquire.

Nikita would crawl to the window, holding on to his brother's shoulders and the backs of the bed and the chairs. His cassock hung on him like a sail on a mast. Sitting down at the window, he would gaze down open-mouthed at the garden and the dark forests rising up like angry bristles in the distance.

"Have a rest now," his brother would say, pulling the flabby lobe of his ear, and going downstairs, he would announce to Olga:

"He is breaking up. He'll soon be . . ."

A fat monk called Father Mardari would come and entreat them to send Nikita off to the monastery, since according to some regulation he had to die there, and it was also essential to bury him there. But the hunchback used his persuasion with Olga:

"Take me there afterwards, when I am dead."

And three times he made the same piteous request:

"Make the lid of the coffin a little higher, so as not to crush me. Don't forget!"

He died four days before the beginning of the War, and on the evening before his death he asked that the monastery might be informed.

"Let them come and fetch me," he said. "I shall be dead by the time they arrive!"

On the morning of the day he died, Yakov helped his father to climb up to the attic, and Artamonov, after crossing himself, stared into the dark, ashy face with its half-shut eyes and sunken mouth. In an unnaturally loud voice Nikita said:

"Forgive me."

"Come now, why do you say that? Forgive you, what for?" muttered Pyotr Artamonov.

"For my insolence. . . ."

"It is you who must forgive me," said Pyotr. "I have made fun of you sometimes. . . ."

"God won't condemn a joke," the monk assured him in a whisper, and after a short silence Artamonov asked:

"So that's how you feel, is it?"

- "Oh, I forgot," began the monk, hastily interrupting his brother. "Yasha, tell Tikhon to saw down the maple near the summer-house. That maple won't ever grow, no. . . ."

Yakov could not bear to listen to his excessively clear voice, or to look at the bones in his chest which stood up in an inhuman way like the corner of a box. In fact, there was nothing human left about that little heap of motionless bones clothed in black, or the hands which held a foreign cross made of brass. He felt sorry for his uncle, but still he could not help wondering why it was the custom for old men and one's family in general to die in the sight of everybody.

After waiting to see if his brother were going to say any more, Artamonov took Yakov's arm and went away. Downstairs he said:

"He is dying."

"Is he?" asked Miron, who was sitting at the table half-hidden behind an enormous sheet of newspaper. He asked his question without raising his eyes from the newspaper, but directly afterwards he threw it on the table and said to his wife in the corner:

"I was right. Read this!"

His rather plump wife came up to the table and Olga, who was sitting by the window, asked in a frightened voice:

"It isn't war, Miron, is it?"

"This is the second Artamonov," Pyotr reminded them loudly.

"It's a lie, of course," said Miron, addressing either his wife or Yakov, who was also leaning over the newspaper, reading the disquieting telegrams and considering in what way all this threatened his interests. With a wave of his arm the elder Artamonov went off to the court-yard, where the sun had made the cobbles so hot that the warmth penetrated the soft

soles of his slippers. The sound of Miron's cold, didactic tones came through the window, and Yakov, who was standing by the window with the newspaper in his hands, saw his father threaten someone with his purple fist.

Three days later the monks arrived early in the morning. There were seven of them, each different from his fellows in height and girth, but to Yakov they appeared as indistinguishable as new-born babies. There was only one who looked different from the rest, and he was the tallest and thinnest of them all, a man with a loud, cheerful voice and a very thick beard which became neither a monk nor the occasion. He walked in front of the others, carrying a large black cross, and appeared not to have any face at all. He was bald-headed, his nose spread over his cheeks, and there was nothing of his face to be seen except two black holes set between his bald forehead and his beard. As he walked he lifted his feet as deliberately as a blind man, and sang in three clefs.

"Holy God" was low, almost in the bass.

"Holy and Mighty" was higher in the tenor, but—

"Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us!" was so shrill that little boys ran in front of him to gaze at his beard in astonishment, thinking it to be the receptacle for some invisible mouth with three voices.

When the funeral procession debouched from the street into the square, it appeared that a large crowd had gathered there, consisting of the inhabitants of the town, men in the reserves, and Lieutenant Mavrin's company of soldiers, with a few of the town authorities and the clergy in the middle of them. The cold-blooded lieutenant stood importantly in front of his men like a monument, with the sun lighting him up, and the cone-shaped priests and deacons stood like golden idols, melting and dwindling away in the sun, the glitter of their chasubles falling also upon Lieutenant Mavrin. A fat officer with a head which appeared to be made of tin was prancing about in front of the lantern, waving his cap.

The monk with the three voices stopped in front of the wall of people and, giving a little shake to the black cross, said in a bass voice:

"Make way!"

However, the crowd made way not for him, but for the lanky chestnut horse belonging to Ekke, the police captain's assistant. He rode right up to the monk, waving his white glove, and placing his horse across the street called out in a hurt and reproachful tone:

"Where are you going? What are you doing? Can't you see? Go back!"

The monk lifted up the cross and began drawling:

"Holy Go-o . . ."

"Hurrah!" shouted the officer, and thousands of voices in the square roared furiously:

"Hurrah!"

Ekke rose in his stirrups and shouted too:

"Pyotr Ilyich, please take the side-street. Make a detour! Miron Alexeyevich, I implore you! There is a demonstration here, and you—how can you?"

Pyotr Artamonov was standing at the head of the coffin, supported by his wife and Yakov, and after gazing up at Ekke's wooden face, he said crossly to the monks who were carrying the coffin:

"You must turn off, Fathers . . ." adding with a sob: "It is the last time apparently, I shall ever give an order."

Yakov thought all this unbecoming and even rather ridiculous. However, when they turned off into the side-street where Polina lived, he caught sight of her walking quickly towards the procession. She had a white dress on beneath her pink parasol, and was hurriedly crossing her prominent bosom, across which her dress was tightly stretched.

"She is coming to admire Mavrin," he thought at once, choking with dust and irritation. The monks went on faster. The one with the black beard started singing more softly and dreamily and the choir stopped singing altogether. Opposite the gate of a slaughter-house outside the town stood a strange-looking cart, covered with black cloth and harnessed to a pair of piebald horses. The coffin was placed upon it and the Requiem Mass was beginning, when a triumphant blare of brass was borne towards them from the street as though

from the mouth of a trumpet. The band was playing "God save the Tsar," the bells were ringing in the three churches, and through the dust and smoke floated the roar of voices :

"Hurrah !"

It seemed to Yakov that he was listening to a command from Lieutenant Mavrin :

"Shun !"

After the requiem he had to drive to his aunt's house and sit for a long time at the banqueting table, listening to his father's angry mutterings.

"What fool ordered the horses to stand opposite the slaughter-house, eh ?"

"The police, the police !" said Mitya soothingly. "It was very inconvenient, you know," he proceeded to explain. "A national demonstration and then a funeral hearse ! The two things don't coincide."

Miron, after licking a smile from his lips, was talking to Doctor Yakovlyev, who was specially conspicuous during those difficult and distressing days.

"Still, if we push forward altogether as Mitka did in 'The Silver Prince' . . . After all, everything in the world is decided by correlative numbers in the end. . . ."

"By technical knowledge," exclaimed the doctor.

"Technical knowledge ? Well, yes . . . but . . ."

It was not until after nine in the evening that Yakov was able to tear himself away from this tedious small-talk and fly off to Polina, filled with an anxiety that had been hitherto unknown to him, and conscious of a misgiving that something extraordinary was about to occur. And that is exactly what happened.

"*Okh !*" said Polina's cook, when he entered the kitchen after crossing the court-yard, and no sooner had she spoken than she sank down heavily on the bench near the stove.

"You miserable procuress !" replied Yakov, and standing still before the door leading into the living-room, he caught the sound of trim soldierly footsteps and a familiar military voice :

"So now you must consider whether it is so or not. . . . Consider!"

"He says 'you' not 'thou,' to her," thought Yakov. "Perhaps nothing has happened yet."

But as soon as he opened the door and stood on the threshold, he was convinced at once that everything had happened already. The cold-blooded lieutenant, his brows knit in a stern frown, was standing in the middle of the room with his uniform unbuttoned and his hands in his pockets. His braces were visible beneath his uniform and one of them had been unfastened from the button on his trousers. Polina was sitting on a couch with her legs crossed, and one stocking hanging in spirals. Her bold eyes were unusually round and her exceedingly flushed face was turning purple.

"Well?" asked the cold-blooded lieutenant, and his question definitely confirmed all Yakov's suspicions. The latter stepped forward and, throwing his hat on a chair, said in a voice so strained that he did not recognize it as his:

"I have come from the funeral . . . from the funeral feast."

"Have you?" queried the lieutenant in the tone of a superior. Polina pulled so hard at her cigarette that it began to crackle, and said through the smoke, in a tone which was careless though not guilty:

"Ippolit Sergeyev is trying to persuade me to become a Sister of Mercy."

"A Sister? M-yes," said Yakov with a smile. Then the cold-blooded lieutenant stepped up to him and, speaking very precisely, asked:

"What does that smile mean? I beg you to remember that I do not like exaggeration! I can't endure it!"

During those two or three minutes Yakov felt a burning flood of humiliation and anger course through his veins. This passed, and he was left with a crushing and almost woeful sense that the little woman was as necessary to him as a part of his body, and that he could not allow her to be torn away from him. Under this impulse his anger returned once more, and he grew cold and stood up with his hands in his pockets.

in which he could scarcely hear Polina's screams owing to the buzzing in his head.

"Oh dear, how disgraceful this is! And it's you, you, who have done it. Such a scandal there'll be. And what for?"

"Go to the devil, young lady!" said the lieutenant in a voice of iron. "Here is a rouble for the pleasure of your company. I have had enough! I can't bear exaggeration, but you are nothing else but an ordinary . . ."

The lieutenant tramped heavily across the floor, slammed the door and disappeared, leaving no sound behind him except the faint ring of the glass upon the hanging lamp and a little cry from Polina. Yakov had raised himself up on his limp legs, but they were bending beneath him and he was trembling all over as if he had caught a chill. Polina stood under the lamp in the middle of the room. Her mouth was open and she was breathing hoarsely and gazing at the dirty rouble-note in her hand.

"You beast," said Yakov. "Why did you do this? And you said . . . I ought to kill you. . . ."

The woman glanced at him and threw the note on the floor.

"Wha-t a blackguard . . ." she drawled hoarsely.

Sinking into the arm-chair, she doubled herself up and clasped her head in her hands, but Yakov struck her on the shoulder with his fist.

"Enough of that!" he shouted. "Give me the revolver."

She did not move, but asked in the same astonished tone:

"So you love me, do you?"

"I hate you."

"You lie! You love me now!"

She sprang upon him so quickly that he had not time to push her away. With furious persistence she clasped him round the neck, scorched him with burning kisses and breathed her hot breath upon his eyes and mouth, whispering:

"It's a lie. You love me. You love me. And I love you too! *Akh*, my dear little salty one. . . ."

"Salty one" was her favourite expression of affection which she only uttered in moments of exceptionally violent excite-

ment, and the sound of it always sent Yakov into an ecstasy of sweet and tender ferocity. So it happened on this occasion.

"You baggage! You base creature! Surely you know . . ."

An hour later he was sitting on the couch and she was lying on his lap.

She was talking in a tired voice.

"I was irritated with you and wanted to throw you over. You were always busy burying your relations, and I was bored. I didn't even know if you loved me. Now you will love me more. You will be jealous about me, because when there is jealousy . . ."

"We ought to go away from here," said Yakov wearily.

"Yes, to Paris. I can speak French."

They had not lighted the lamp and the room was dark and stuffy. In the street could be heard the shouts of the reserves and of women, although it was late, past midnight.

"One can't go abroad now. There's war there," Yakov reminded her. "War, damn them. . . ."

Once more the woman began talking about herself.

"Only dogs can love without being jealous. Look at the way all dramas and romances are founded on jealousy."

Yakov smiled and shuddered.

"That was a good shot with the revolver. The bullet might have hit me in the leg, but look, it has only made a little hole in my trousers."

Polina pushed a finger into the little hole, then suddenly burst into sobs and said in a tone of quiet but ferocious anger:

"*Akh*, what a pity you didn't succeed in shooting him! You might have hit him in his tight india-rubber stomach!"

"Be quiet!" said Yakov, shaking her violently, but she went on hissing through her teeth in the same ferocious tone:

"The scoundrel! What an insult! You are all like that. . . . You don't understand women in the least!"

And drawing back her swollen lips and displaying her firmly clenched fox-like teeth, she finished by saying:

"Surely if a woman has forsaken you, it doesn't mean in the least that she has ceased to love you!"



"Be quiet, I tell you," shouted Yakov, and he squeezed her so hard that she groaned.

"O*i*, now I can feel you love me! Yasha, my little salty one!"

He left her at dawn with a light step, feeling he was a man who had played a dangerous game and won a valuable prize. The fact of having asked Polina for the hidden revolver at his departure, and her unwillingness to give it back to him, added still more to his peace of mind; for he was obliged to tell her that he was afraid of going without it and to inform her of his affair with Noskov. Her alarm gave him great satisfaction and her agitation convinced him that she cared for him and loved him. She sighed and, clasping her hands, began to reproach him:

"Why didn't you tell me about this? Of course it is very interesting, his being a detective!" she proceeded to reflect anxiously. "There is Sherlock Holmes, for instance. Have you read about him? But with us surely even detectives are scoundrels, aren't they?"

"Of course they are," Yakov assured her.

When she gave him back the revolver, she wished to make sure he was a good shot and accordingly induced him to fire into the open stove, to do which he was obliged to lie on his stomach on the floor. She lay down herself as well, and Yakov fired a shot which made the embers blow angrily out of the stove at them. Polina gasped and rolled away, then she raised her hand and said quietly:

"Look!"

In the painted boards was a little hole which went in deep and slanting.

"Only to think that death went in there!" said Polina with a sigh, as she knitted her finely drawn brows.

Never before had Yakov seen her so affectionate or felt her so close to him. Her eyes gazed at him with childlike surprise while he was telling her the story of Noskov and there was no trace of spitefulness left in her pointed boyish face.

"She doesn't realize she is to blame," thought Yakov in astonishment, and the thought was a pleasant one.

While she was seeing him off, she stroked his beard.

"*Akh*, Yasha, Yasha!" she said. "So that is the end of that! Are we seriously . . . ? Oh dear . . . that scoundrel!"

She clenched her fist and shook it.

"Lord, what a lot of scoundrels there are!" she complained indignantly.

But suddenly she seized hold of Yakov's hand.

"Wait a bit!" she said softly, with a thoughtful frown on her face. "Of course there is a girl here. . . ."

Then she beamed at him, and after making the sign of the cross over him let him go.

"Be off, my salty one!"

The morning was fresh and dewy. A breeze was blowing, heralding the dawn, and the pearly-green sky was fragrant with the scent of apples.

"Of course she misconducted herself out of spite and I must marry her as soon as father dies," he thought magnanimously, and at the same moment he recalled a funny remark of Scraphim the Comforter's:

"Every girl is a drowning creature and clutches at a straw. That is the time to catch her!"

Yakov found the thought of the cold-blooded lieutenant disturbing, for his rival did not look like a straw, and being very angry would probably try to damage him. Still, the lieutenant was bound to be sent to the War. And even about Noskov Yakov Artamonov thought more calmly, although he kept looking round suspiciously, listening attentively, and pressing the trigger of the revolver in his pocket, for this was exactly the time when Noskov most frequently waylaid him.

However, two weeks went by and fear of the huntsman again enveloped him in a suffocating cloud of smoke. On Sunday, while he was inspecting a wood which had been bought by Voroponov for timber, he caught sight of Noskov as he was making his way through the undergrowth, hung round with traps and carrying a sack on his back.

"A fortunate meeting for you!" said Noskov, coming up to him and taking off his cap. He wore it in military fashion,

with the crown pressed down over his right eyebrow, and in removing it he took hold of it by the top part instead of the peak.

Yakov made no reply to this strange greeting, which he felt was a veiled threat, but clenched his teeth and clutched convulsively at the revolver in his pocket. Noskov also remained silent for a moment while he unpicked the lining of his cap with his finger, keeping his eyes averted from Yakov.

"Well?" asked Artamonov. Noskov raised his dog-like eyes and smoothed his hair, which was rough and standing on end.

"Your lady-love, that is to say, Pelageya Andreyevna," he said, speaking with great precision, "has made the acquaintance of a daughter of the priest Sladkopyevtsev. So you had better tell her to stop it."

"Why?"

"You had better, that's all. . . ."

And catching the sound of bells in the town, the huntsman added:

"I give you advice with the greatest of good-will because I wish you well. And now make me a present of"—he looked at the sky and made a calculation—"thirty-five roubles."

"Shall I shoot the dog?" thought Yakov Artamonov as he counted out the money.

The huntsman took the notes and, without putting his cap on, turned round on his bow legs and made his way into the undergrowth, jingling his iron traps. And Yakov felt that he had become more painfully repugnant to him than ever.

"Noskov!" he called softly, and the man stopped, half-hidden behind the branches of a fir tree.

"Supposing you give this up!" he suggested.

"Why?" asked Noskov, poking his head forward, and as he did so Artamonov thought he saw a gleam of either fear or malice in his vacant eyes.

"It is dangerous work," explained Yakov.

"One must know how to do it," said Noskov, and the light in his eyes went out. "Everything is a danger to the ignorant."

"Have it your own way."

"You are speaking against your own interests."

"What is to be gained by enmity," muttered Yakov, regretting that he had engaged the spy in conversation.

"Just look at the idiot arguing away . . ." he thought.

"People can't live without enmity," said Noskov didactically. "Everyone has his own enemies, his own wants. Good-bye!"

Turning his back upon Yakov, he forced his way into the dense foliage of the fir-trees. And the other, after listening to the rustle he made among the prickly branches and the cracking of dry twigs, walked quickly away to a clearing where his horse and droshky were waiting, and drove off to the town to see Polina.

"The scoundrel!" she exclaimed, almost with delight. "He has found out already that she comes to see me, has he? Just imagine it!"

"Why do you make friends with people like her?" asked Yakov in a tone of angry reproach. But she was angry too, and babbled on, pulling at the yellow gauze scarf on her breast:

"Firstly, I have to do it for your sake! And secondly—do you expect me to be content with cats and dogs and a Mavrin? I sit here all alone as if I were in prison. I have no one to go out with. And she is interesting. She gives me novels and magazines. She is interested in politics and tells me about everything. I was at Popova's gymnasium with her, then we quarrelled."

Poking her finger into his shoulder, she went on in still greater irritation:

"Do you imagine it is easy to live as a man's secret mistress? Sladkopyevtseva says a mistress is a necessity, like rubber galoshes when it is muddy. She has a love-affair with your doctor and they don't conceal it, but you hide me away like a scab. You are ashamed of me, as if I were blind in one eye or hunchbacked. Whereas I am not in the least deformed."

"Wait," said Yakov, "and I'll marry you. I mean it, even although you are a pig."

"And another question is, which of us is the more piggish?" she shouted, and went off into roars of childish laughter, repeating: "More piggish, more priggish—oh, how muddled I am! My little salty one. . . . You are a darling! You aren't in the least greedy. Anyone else would have kept quiet, because surely this spy is useful to you. . . ."

Yakov went away from her as usual with his mind at rest; but a week later he was informed early in the morning by Yelagin, the time-keeper, a little man with a pocked-marked skin and a crooked nose, that at dawn when the weavers had been netting fish, one of them, Mordvinov by name, had been nearly drowned in an attempt to save the drowned body of Noskov the huntsman, and was now lying in the hospital. Yakov sat with his legs stretched out while he listened to this nasal announcement, so as to bury his hands deep in his pockets and hide their trembling.

"They have drowned him," he thought; but as he pictured to himself good-natured Mordvinov, a man with a soft face like a woman, he could not believe he was capable of murdering anyone.

"A happy accident," he thought with a sigh of relief, and Polina agreed with him.

"Of course it is better it should be so," she said, knitting her brows seriously, "because if they had killed him in any other way there would have been a row."

But added regretfully:

"It would have been more interesting to catch him and force him to repent, and then hang or shoot him. Did you read that . . ."

"You are talking nonsense, Polka," interrupted Yakov.

A few days went by in peace, during which Yakov went to Vorgorod and Miron came back.

"Another unsavoury incident for us," he said with an anxious frown. "Following instructions from the provincial town, Ekke is investigating the circumstances under which this huntsman was drowned. They have arrested Mordvinov, Kiryakov and the stoker Krotov, the buffoon of the party, and in fact everyone who was fishing with the huntsman.

Mordvinov has a scratch on his face and a lacerated ear. They see some political significance in it, it seems. . . . Not in the lacerated ear, of course."

He stood near the piano, swinging his pince-nez on his finger and gazing into the corner with half-closed eyes. In his crumpled leather jacket, rust-red trousers and high dusty boots reaching to the knee, he looked like a mechanic, but his bony, smooth-shaven cheeks and close-cut moustache reminded one of a soldier. The expression of his immobile face hardly ever changed, whatever he happened to be talking about.

"It's an idiotic time!" he said thoughtfully. "Here we are encumbered with a fresh war. We are making war, as we always do, to distract attention from our own stupidity. We don't know how to wage war on stupidity. We haven't the strength. In the meantime all the problems we have to face are at home. In this peasant-owned country the dream of the working classes is to get the power into their own hands. In their ranks is Ilya Artamonov, the son of a merchant and a member of the class which has been called upon to undertake the great work of Europeanizing the country in industry and technical knowledge. One folly after another! The betrayal of the interests of one's class ought to be punished as a capital offence, because, broadly speaking, it is treason against the state. I can understand it from a member of the intelligentsia like Goritsvyetov, who has no ties of any kind and nowhere to lay his head, because he has no capacity for work and can only read and talk. I generally find that revolutionary activity in Russia is solely an occupation for incapable men."

It seemed to Yakov that his cousin was talking as if he saw a roomful of people before him. He kept screwing his eye up more and more till at last they were quite shut. Yakov ceased to listen to what he was saying and began thinking of his own affairs, and wondering how the inquiry into Noskov's death would end and what effect it would have on himself.

Then Miron's wife came in, heavy with child and looking like a chest of drawers, and ran her eyes over him.

"Come and change your clothes," she said in a tire-

voice, and Miron meekly flung his spectacles on his nose and departed.

When, in about a month's time, all the arrested men had been discharged, Miron said to Yakov in a stern voice which admitted of no objection :

"You must dismiss them all."

Without being aware of it, Yakov had accustomed himself from long habit to obey his cousin's cold commands. He even looked upon it as a convenience, because it took the responsibility for affairs at the factory off his shoulders. Still, he said :

"We ought to keep the stoker on."

"Why ?"

"He is a cheerful fellow. He has worked for us for a long time, and he keeps the men amused."

"Does he ? Well, supposing we keep him, then. Buffoons are indeed useful," he added, licking his lips.

For a short time it seemed to Yakov that things in general were going on well. The war had suppressed people's excitement and everyone had become quieter and more thoughtful. But he was accustomed to disagreeable experiences and anxiously awaited fresh ones with a foreboding that there were more in store for him. He had not long to wait. Once more Nyestyerenko appeared in the town with a tall woman like Vera Popova on his arm. When he met Yakov in the street, he looked right through him while he was still in the distance, and then came up and wished him good day.

"Can you come and see me in an hour's time ?" he asked. "I am staying with my father-in-law. My wife is dying, you know. So I beg of you not to ring at the front-door. It disturbs her. Go through the court-yard. Good-bye !"

The hour dragged by, weary and interminable, and when Yakov had seated himself drearily on a chair, in a room filled with bookcases, Nyestyerenko said in a low voice, as if he were listening for something :

"Well, they have put our friend out of the way. There is no doubt about that, though it has not been proved. It was cleverly done and they are to be commended. Now what

I want to ask you is this: the lady of your heart, Pelageya Nazarova, is a friend of the girl Sladkopyevtseva, who was arrested some days ago at Vorgorod. Do you know her?"

"I don't," said Yakov, and sweat immediately broke out all over him; but the gendarme raised a hand to his nose and began examining his nails.

"You do know her," he said very quietly.

"Perhaps I do, after all."

"Exactly."

"What does he want?" wondered Yakov, surveying from under his eyebrows the gendarme's flat grey face with its red veins, broad nose and bleary eyes, which seemed to be oozing depression and boredom and shedding acid, winy streams.

"I am not talking to you officially, but as a friend who wishes you well and sympathizes with your business interests," Yakov heard him say in a rather hoarse voice. "So you see how it is, my dear . . . marksman!" The gendarme smiled. "I say marksman," he explained after a pause, "because I know of another occasion when you made unsuccessful use of fire-arms. So you see the Sladkopyevtseva girl is a friend of Nazarova, the lady of your heart. And now consider that the nature of Noskov's activities could not be known to anyone except you and me, and that I am excluded from this chain of acquaintances. Noskov was no fool, although he was so feeble and . . ."

Nyestyerenko looked under the table with a sigh.

"Nothing lasts for ever. And now about yourself. . . ."

In Yakov Artamonov's imagination, what fell from the officer's lips were not words, but little, fine, invisible halters which cut into his neck and strangled him so effectually that his chest grew cold, his heart stopped beating, and everything rocked and roared round him like a winter snow-storm. Nyestyerenko went on speaking with a deliberation which was obviously intentional.

"I think, I am almost sure, that you have been allowing yourself to make indiscreet remarks, haven't you? You think, now!"



"No, I haven't," said Yakov softly, fearful that his voice would betray him.

"Are you sure?" asked the officer, brushing his moustache with his red fingers.

"No, I haven't," repeated Yakov, shaking his head.

"That's strange. Very strange. However, the damage can be repaired. This is what we must do: Noskov's place must be taken by the same sort of man, someone who will be useful to you. A man called Minayev will call upon you. You will engage him, won't you?"

"All right," said Yakov.

"That's all. The matter is at an end. Be careful, I beg of you! Not a word to any ladies! Do you understand?"

"He talks to me as if I were a little boy or a fool," thought Yakov.

Afterwards the gendarme talked about the autumn migration of birds and how imminent it was, about the War, his wife's illness, and how his sister was looking after her at present.

"Still, one must be prepared for the worst," he said, and taking hold of the ends of his moustaches, he lifted them up to the fat lobes of his ears, raising his upper lip at the same time and displaying his yellow fangs.

"I must escape," thought Yakov. "He will get me into trouble. I must go away."

"The devil take the lot of you!" he thought, as he walked along the bank of the Oka. "What do I want with you? What do I want?"

Fine rain, the harbinger of autumn, was falling idly down and sprinkling the ground. The yellow water in the river was covered with ripples, and in the nauseously warm air was something which plunged Yakov Artamonov still deeper into melancholy. Was it impossible to lead a quiet simple life without all these absurd and unnecessary anxieties?

But the months glided by one after another like a train of sledges in a winter snow-storm, each loaded with a heavy burden of strange anxieties.

Zakhar, one of the Morozovs, came back from the War with the St. George's Cross on his breast, and his head bald

from burns and covered with red sores. He had had an ear torn off, and where his right eyebrow should have been was a red scar, which hid beneath it a crushed and lifeless eye. The expression of his other eye, however, was stern and intent. He at once made friends with the stoker Krotov, and this lame pupil of Seraphim's started singing a song, which he accompanied himself :

"Oh, wind and rain together vie,  
While in a filthy trench I lie,  
And I am helping—idiot I—  
To fight for Europe, though I die!"

"Well, Zakhar, how is the War going? Badly?" Yakov asked Morozov.

"Not at all well," replied the weaver. His tone was bold and insolent, and his remarks coloured by the hopeless ribaldry of the stoker's songs.

"We have no master, Yakov Pyetrovich," he said to Yakov's face. "Everything is run by swindlers."

He and Vaska somehow became strikingly conspicuous, just like the lanterns that burn in the darkness of autumn nights. When Tatyana's gay husband dressed up in trousers with a ridiculously wide seat, the same colour as Zakhar's rotting military overcoat, the stoker looked at him and sang:

"A pair of baggy trousers! See  
What different men have got 'em—  
For some grow big at the top like me,  
And some grow big at the . . ."

To Yakov's astonishment his brother-in-law was not in the least offended at this chaff, but roared with laughter, with the evident intention of inciting the stoker to a further display of insolence. The workmen smiled too, but what made the factory laugh more than anything else was when Zakhar Morozov brought a shaggy-looking puppy into the court-yard with its tail curled up in heroic fashion over its back, and a white St. George's Cross tied with bast dangling at the end of it.

This piece of effrontery was more than Miron could stand.

Zakhar was arrested by the police and the puppy found itself in Tikhon Vyalov's possession.

Lame, blind and armless men were walking about the streets of the town—men broken by every kind of suffering, who wore soldiers' overcoats and whose clothes painted the whole district the colour of a festering wound. These broken, battered soldiers used to be taken out for walks by the ladies of the town, led by Vera Popova, who was as thin and slender as a broom. She even tried to interest Polina in this work, but the latter would only shake her head and begin screaming and complaining :

"Oi, no, I can't. It is disgusting! Look, Yasha, how young and healthy they all are, and yet they are all maimed, and they smell so dreadfully—no, I can't. Listen, let us go away!"

"Where?" Yakov would inquire gloomily. He noticed that his mistress was becoming more and more irritable, that she smoked a great deal and that her breath smelt of bitter fumes. And, generally speaking, all the women in the town—and in the factory especially—were becoming more bad-tempered. They were always full of grumbles, sneers and complaints about the cost of living, and though their husbands would whistle an air and demand a rise in wages, their standard of work became steadily lower. And in the evening a new noise made itself heard in the factory village—the noise of loud, angry murmurs.

The grave locksmith, Minayev, went in and out among the workmen. He was a man of thirty, with a dark complexion and a large nose like a Jew, and Yakov kept timidly out of his way and tried to avoid meeting the gaze of his dark eyes, which looked at everybody as if he had forgotten something and could not remember what it was.

Pyotr Artamonov would drift about the yard like a dirty shapeless mass, hardly able to move his crippled legs at all. Nowadays a travelling coat made of fox-fur hung from his broad shoulders, though the fur itself was worn out. He would stop people and inquire sternly where they were going. And when they told him, he would wave his hand and mutter :

"Go along then, you idlers! Bugs that suck my blood!" And his bloated purple face would quiver with disgust and his lower lip hang loose. Yakov was ashamed of his father before other people. His sister Tatyana spent her whole day rustling newspapers and lived in such a state of fright that her ears were always red. Miron kept flying off like a bird to the provincial town, to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and on his return would stamp the ground with the broad heels of his American boots and tell malevolent stories about a drunken, dissolute peasant who had fastened on the Tsar like a leech.

"I don't believe such a peasant exists," Olga would say obstinately, as she sat half-blind beside her daughter-in-law on the sofa, where the latter's two-year-old son Platon was romping and shouting. "The story has been invented on purpose as an example of . . ."

"It is most remarkable!" Tatyana's gay husband would exclaim. "It's astonishing! The village is having its revenge! Aha!" And he would rub his fat hands together in delight—they were covered with coarse red hair—being the only one who confidently expected a holiday of some kind.

"Oh dear!" Tatyana would exclaim in vexation. "What are you so glad about? I don't understand."

"Wha-t? You don't understand?" Mitya would croak in open-mouthed astonishment. "Well, take it in now! The village is having its revenge for all its sufferings in the past. In the person of this peasant it has perfected a highly destructive poison."

"Excuse me," Miron would say with a frown, "but you were saying something quite different a little while ago."

But Mitya would continue in a penetrating whisper, choking over his words in his excitement:

"He is a symbol, not merely a peasant! Only three years ago they were celebrating the three-hundredth anniversary of their supremacy, and now a . . ."

"Fiddlesticks," Miron would reply sharply, at which Doctor Yakovlyev would smile as usual, while Yakov Artamonov

thought that if these speeches ever came to the ears of Nyest-yerenko the gendarme . . .

"Why are you saying all this?" he would ask. "What sense is there in it?"

And he would persuade them to stop.

He noticed that even Miron was unusually absent-minded and anxious, and this Yakov found particularly disturbing. In the end Mitya was the only one who remained the same as he always had been, and who continued to spin round like a top and spurt out jokes in the same old way. In the evening he would play his guitar and sing:

"Dead in her grave my dear wife lies . . ."

But Tatyana did not care for his songs any longer.

"Phew, how tired I am of them!" she would say, and go off to the children.

Mitya knew well how to keep the workpeople quiet. He advised Miron to buy in stocks of flour, grain, and peas from the villages, and to sell potatoes to the workpeople at cost price, making allowance only for transport and wastage. They were pleased at this, and it became obvious to Yakov that the factory placed more faith in this gay fellow than in Miron. He saw too that Miron was quarrelling with Tatyana's husband more and more frequently.

"You want to go whichever way the wind blows, don't you?" asks Miron sharply, making no attempt to hide his ill-temper.

"The will of the people . . . the rights of the people . . ." replies Mitya with a smile.

"I am asking you who you think you are?" shouts Miron.

"Stop that row," growls Artamonov senior, but Yakov sees a gleam of satisfaction in his father's dim eyes. The old man watches the quarrels between his son-in-law and nephew with delight, and smiles when he hears Tatyana's irritated whine, and when Natalya asks timidly:

"Pour me out another little cup, Tanya."

Every fresh event was an alarming one and fell like a bolt from the blue, bearing no connection with what had gone before. Suddenly Olga, who had become completely blind,

caught cold and died in forty-eight hours, and within a few days of her death the town and the factory received the astounding intelligence that the Tsar had abdicated.

"What will happen now? Will there be a republic?" Yakov asked his cousin, whose nose was glued to the newspaper in delight.

"Of course there will be a republic!" replied Miron. He was leaning over the table with his hands resting on the open newspaper, and the result was that the paper became taut and split in two with a loud tearing sound. To Yakov this seemed an evil omen, but Miron merely straightened himself, and his face wore a strange expression as he said in an unnatural tone of voice, at once clamorous and gentle:

"This is the beginning of Russia's recovery and revival; that's what it is, my friend!"

He held out his arms as if to embrace Yakov, but the next moment let one of them drop. The other he kept stretched out, then raised it, straightened his pince-nez, and again held it out, making himself look like a semaphore. To-morrow he would go to Moscow, he declared.

Mitya would also stretch his arms out like a frozen coachman and shout:

"Now all will go well. Now at last the nation will utter the mighty word that has been so long maturing in its soul."

Miron no longer argued with him. He only smiled thoughtfully and licked his lips, and Yakov could see the reason was that all had gone well and everyone was delighted. From the front-door steps Mitya would tell the workmen who gathered in the court-yard what was happening in St. Petersburg, and the women would shout hurrah, and then seize Mitya by the arms and legs and start throwing him up in the air. Mitya would roll himself into a big ball and fly up to a great height, but when they began tossing Miron he somehow came to pieces in the air, and it looked as if his arms and legs were being torn off. Mitya would be surrounded by a crowd of old workmen and a huge muscular weaver called Gerasim Volnov would shout in his face:

## DECADENCE

"Mitri Pavlov, you are the right man for us! The right man, do you understand? Give him a cheer, lads!"

And they would shout hurrah, and Vaska the stoker, with his bald pate gleaming, would dance and bawl out a song as if he were drunk:

"Men who worship afar  
The throne of the Tsar,  
Come nearer, and lo!  
On the throne a black crow!"

"Go on, Vaska!" they would shout encouragingly.

They wanted to toss Yakov up too, but he ran away and hid in the house, convinced that when the workmen had thrown him up they would neglect to catch him in their arms, and then he would be dashed to pieces on the ground. As he sat in the office one evening, he heard Tikhon's voice in the court-yard beneath his window:

"Why did you take the puppy away? Sell him to me. I'll make a good dog of him."

"*Ekk*, old man, is this the time to train dogs?" replied Zakhar Morozov.

"What is the good of him to you? Sell him. Take a rouble for him, will you?"

"Stop it."

"The Tsar, Tikhon, eh?" said Yakov, looking out of the window.

"Yes," exclaimed the old man, and glancing round the corner of the house he gave a low whistle.

"They have dethroned the Tsar!"

Tikhon bent down and pulled up the leg of his boot.

"They have made a move at last," he said, addressing the ground. "That's what Antonov used to say: 'The cart has lost a wheel!'"

Then he straightened himself and went off round the corner of the house, calling softly:

"Tulun, Tulun . . ."

Weeks of boisterous gaiety were spent in dancing. Miron, Tatyana, the doctor, yes, and everyone else as well, began

to treat one another with greater kindness. Some strangers from the town appeared and took the locksmith Minayev away with them. Then spring came, and with it sunshine and warmth.

"Listen, my salty one," Polina would say. "I still don't understand what has happened. The Tsar has refused to govern. All the soldiers have been killed and maimed, the police driven out, and some civilians or other are in power. How are we to exist now? Every devil will do exactly what he likes, and of course Zhiteikin won't give me any peace—neither he nor all the others who used to make love to me and whom I refused. I don't want to live here. I can't live here now that everyone is out for the same thing. I ought to go and live in a place where nobody knows me. And then surely the object of all this—I mean this revolution and freedom—is that each one of us may live as he likes!"

Polina's arguments grew more and more persistent and long-winded. Yakov felt there was something incontestable about them, and tried to calm her by saying:

"Wait a little till things have settled down, then. . . ."

But he no longer believed that the excitement would subside. Every day he saw the ferment at the factory increasing and the outlook becoming more threatening. A man who has allowed fear to become a habit will always find a pretext for it, and Yakov began to be frightened of Zakhar Morozov's scorched head. Zakhar moved about with an air of importance. The workmen followed him as sheep follow a sheepdog, and Mitya hovered round him like a tame magpie. As a matter of fact, Morozov bore a resemblance to a large dog which has learnt to walk on its hind legs. The scorched skin on his head must have cracked a little, because he sometimes swathed his head, turban-fashion, in a rough bath-towel of Tatyana's which Mitya had given him. His enormous head seemed to compress him and made him look shorter than he really was. He strutted about like the fat assistant of Ekke, the police-captain, with his thumbs stuck in the belt of his tattered military trousers and his fingers moving up and down like the fins of a fish.



## DECADENCE

"Order, mates!" he kept shouting.

When he tried three lads for the theft of some linen, he asked the thieves in a loud voice, which might be heard all over the court-yard:

"Do you understand whom you have stolen it from?"

And he himself replied:

"You have stolen it from yourselves, from all of us. Is stealing possible nowadays, you sons of a——"

He ordered the thieves to be flogged, and two workmen readily thrashed them with willow rods, while Vaska danced and sang excitedly:

"See them lash the culprit's back!

'How just a judge!' the people quack."

Breaking off, he muttered something with his arms outstretched, and suddenly shouted:

"O Lord, save Thy people!"

"Bravo!" shouted Mitya.

Mitya was running about in grey trousers, with a leather cap pulled over the back of his head. Perspiration was glistening on his red-brown face and a look of intoxicating joy shone out of his green eyes. The night before he had had a violent quarrel with his wife. First Yakov had heard a loud whisper float out into the garden from the window of their room, and later on an uncontrollable scream had come from Tatyana:

"You are a clown! You are a dishonourable man! Your convictions, indeed? Beggars have no convictions. It is a lie! A month ago these convictions of yours . . . But I have had enough! To-morrow I am going to my sister in the town. . . . Yes, and the children too!"

Yakov was not surprised at this, for he had seen for a long time that red-haired Mitya was becoming more and more disgusting. Still, he felt some surprise and even a little pride at having been the first to notice his untrustworthiness. Even Natalya, who a little while ago had liked Mitya just as she liked poultry, was now beginning to grumble at him.

"How is it he has become so difficult to deal with? He

might be a young Sheeney! There you are! You feed them and then they . . ."

"Everything is superb!" Mitya would cry. "Life is a beautiful woman, a wise woman! As for fables about the possibility of wolves and sheep living together in peace—they should all be forgotten, Tatyana Petrovna! It is too late for that sort of thing!"

"And what will you be saying to-morrow?" Miron would ask in a cold, angry tone.

"Whatever life prompts me to say! Well, is there anything further you want to ask?"

Miron and his wife could not have approached Mitya with greater caution even if he had been daubed with soot. Within a few days he moved to the town, taking with him his belongings, which consisted of three large parcels of books and a basket of linen.

On every side Yakov observed the fires of senseless unrest. The smoke of blatant stupidity rose from everyone in clouds and there was no sign of these mad days coming to an end.

"Well," he said to Polina, "I have made up my mind. We will go! First to Moscow, and then—well, we must think. . . ."

"At last!" she exclaimed in delight, as she covered him with kisses and embraces.

The July evening, which had flooded the garden with crimson twilight, was wafting through the window the heavy scent of rain-drenched, sun-warmed soil. It was lovely but sad.

Yakov took Polina's hot damp arms from his neck.

"Cover up your chest!" he said thoughtfully; "in fact, get dressed! We must be serious!"

She sprang off his lap on to the floor and reached the bed in two bounds. Then wrapping herself in a dressing-gown, she seated herself with a business-like air at his side.

"You see," he began, making a scratching sound with his beard as he rubbed it over his cheek, "we must think and try to find some place, some country, where things are quiet,

and where we shan't have to know or think about affairs that don't concern us. That's the place for us!"

"Of course," said Polina.

"We shall have to be very cautious. Miron says the trains are crowded with deserters from the army. We shall have to pretend to be poor."

• "Yes; only take as much money as you can with you."

"Of course, I shall. But I shall go away without even telling my own family where I am going. I shall pretend I am going to Vorganod; do you understand?"

"But why make a secret of it?" asked Polina in suspicious surprise.

He did not know why, the idea having only just that moment occurred to him. Still, he felt it was a good one.

"Well, you know, there is my father and Miron . . . they will ask questions. . . . It is all unnecessary. There is money in Moscow. I can get hold of a lot of money there, good money . . ."

"Only do be quick!" implored Polina. "You see life is impossible. Everything is dear, and there is nothing to be got. And probably people will be plundering soon because—how else can they live?"

She glanced round at the door and whispered:

"There is the cook, now. She used to be kind-hearted, but now she has become insolent and always seems to be drunk. She may murder me while I am asleep. Why shouldn't she murder me when everything is in such confusion? Yesterday I heard her talking to someone in a whisper. 'Oh dear!' I thought to myself. 'What can it be?' But when I softly opened the door, there she was muttering away on her knees! Oh, it was terrible!"

"Wait a moment," said Yakov, stemming the rapid flow of her anxious whispers. "I shall go first. . . ."

"No, you won't," she said loudly, hitting him on the knee with her little fist. "I shall go first! You will give me some money and . . ."

"So you don't trust me?" he asked in a hurt and angry tone. The answer he received was a firm one:

"No, I don't. I am honest and tell you straight out: I don't! Can one trust anyone nowadays, when even the Tsar has been betrayed and everyone else is being forsaken? Whom do you trust yourself?"

She spoke convincingly, but her breast spoke even more convincingly than herself from the folds of her loose dressing-gown. Yakov Artamonov gave way to her, and they decided that she should get ready to start on the following day, go to Vorgorod and wait for him there.

The next day Yakov began to complain of a pain in his stomach and head, which was not in the least surprising, for he had grown very much thinner during the last few months and was now vague and feeble, and his once sparkling eyes were dim. In eight days' time he was travelling along the road which led from Vorgorod to the railway station, pursuing his way quietly along the edge of the worn-out roadway, where the cobbles had been torn from their places and were to be seen sticking up among deep ruts, in which the mud had dried and was now piled up in little heaps and scarred with cracks. Behind him life too lay in shattered fragments, and before him a lifeless sun shone like a pale spot from a soft hole in the midst of smoky clouds.

A month later Miron Artamonov arrived from Moscow.

"I have some sad news to give you," he said to Tatyana, bending his head down and examining the palm of his hand. "That vulgar girl whom Yakov has been living with came to see me in Moscow, and she said that some men—ahem! What dreadful men there are about now!--had knocked him senseless and thrown his body out of a railway-carriage. . ."

"No!" screamed Tatyana, trying to rise from her chair.

. . . "While the train was going. He died within forty-eight hours and she had him buried in a village cemetery near Petushki railway station!"

Tatyana silently pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Her sharp shoulders began to quiver, and her black dress fell over them in a way which suggested that her gaunt frame with its long neck was melting away.

Miron straightened his pince-nez, rubbed his hands together once or twice, cracking his knuckles as he did so, and listened to the sound of the solitary bell which was ringing for vespers.

"What is the good of crying?" he said as he paced up and down the room. "Between ourselves, he was an entirely useless person and disgracefully stupid. Forgive me! Of course, I am sorry. Very sorry."

"Oh dear!" said Tatyana, as she blinked her reddened eyelids and smoothed her eyebrows with a moistened finger.

"That forward girl," said Miron, putting his hands in his pockets, "is making a very clumsy pretence at being his sorrowing widow, but she is dressed so flashily that it's quite obvious that she has fleeced Yakov. She says she has been writing to us here."

Tatyana shook her head.

"Hasn't she? I knew she hadn't. I don't think it is necessary to tell his father and mother about this. Let them think that he is alive. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, that's the best plan," agreed Tatyana.

"Besides, it seems that Uncle Pyotr can't take anything in now, and Yakov's mother would only drown herself in tears."

Tatyana nodded.

"We shall all be killed soon," she said.

"Possibly, if we stay here. But I am sending my wife and children away at once. And I advise you to be off, too, and not to wait until Zakhar Morozov . . . So we won't say anything to the old people, then? And now you must excuse me. I am going home. My wife is poorly."

He took his cousin's hand in his long fingers and shook it.

"You can't believe how difficult travelling is now," he said as he left her. "The roads are in a most appalling state!"

Artamonov senior, who was now always half-asleep, was slowly sinking into still deeper slumbers. He spent the night and the greater part of the day in bed, and the rest of the time he sat in an arm-chair facing the window, from where he could see an expanse of blue sky and the clouds which now and then came and smudged it. The looking-glass showed him

the reflection of a fat old man with a bloated face, bunged-up eyes, and a matted grey beard, and as he gazed at his own face, he thought :

“A fine gnat.”

His wife would come and bend over him and worry him with her whimpering :

“You ought to go away; you ought to be under a doctor. . . .”

“Go away !” Artamonov would say in a lazy voice. “Go away, you horse. I am tired of you. Let me have some peace.”

Left to himself, he would listen to the sounds of holiday-making which proceeded from the court-yard, the garden and everywhere else, though the factory itself was silent.

His customary companion, the man who had been deceived and had enlivened him with his stimulating ideas, had disappeared and died. It was just as well, because thinking was an effort to the old man. He did not wish to think and had realized long ago that it was useless to do so, because of the impossibility of understanding anything. Where had they all disappeared to—Yakov, Tatyana, and his son-in-law ?

Sometimes he would question his wife.

“Has Ilya come back ?”

“No.”

“Not yet ?”

“No.”

“And Yakov—has he come back ?”

“No, he hasn’t either.”

“I see. They are on the spree. And Miroshka is sucking the business dry.”

“Don’t think about that,” advised Natalya.

“Go away.”

She would go off to a corner and sit there with her dim eyes fixed on this wreck of a man with whom she had spent her whole life. Her head was shaky, and her hands might have been dislocated, their movements were so erratic. She was thinner, too, and seemed to be melting away like a guttering tallow candle.

On occasions, which became more and more frequent, Pyotr

Artamonov was aroused by a mysterious commotion in the house. Strange men kept appearing, and he would look at them and try to understand their noisy ravings.

"Gentlemen, why is this?" he would hear his wife wail. "What are you doing it for? Don't you know he is the master, and we are the master and mistress! Come now, let me take him away. He ought to be under a doctor. He ought to go to the town. Will you allow me to take him away?"

"She wants to hide me. But why should she hide me?" Artamonov would think to himself. "She is a fool. She has been a fool all her life. Yakov has taken after her, and so have the others. But Ilya has taken after me. He will come back and bring order into . . ."

Rain and snow were falling, and the air was full of the crackle of frost and the howl and whistle of the snow-storm.

Artamonov was shaken out of this half-waking, half-sleeping condition by the sharp pangs of hunger. He found himself in the summer-house in the garden. Through the window-panes he could see the red sky gleaming between the wet branches, and it looked extraordinarily near, so near that it might have been hanging down just behind the trees, and had he stretched out his hand he might have touched it.

"I want something to eat," he said, but no one answered him.

A damp blue mist filled the garden. Two horses, a grey one and a dark one, stood in front of the summer-house with their heads resting on each other's necks, and on the bench behind them a man in a white shirt sat disentangling a large bundle of cords.

"Natalya, do you hear? Give me something to eat. . . ."

Before, when he had called her on waking from his slumbers, she had always appeared at once. She was always somewhere near, but to-day she was not to be found.

"What can it be?" thought Artamonov, and his head became clearer. "Has she been taken ill?"

He raised his head. Something was glittering through the bushes near the bath-house door. Afterwards it turned out

to be a gun and bayonet on the back of a greenish-coloured soldier, who was indistinguishable from the bushes.

"Is this a joke of yours, comrades?" shouted someone in the court-yard. "Is this the way to treat horses? Even pigs are better looked after! And why hasn't the hay been put away? It has got wet. Do you want to be locked up in the bath-house?"

The man in the white shirt threw the cords on the ground and stood up.

"The devil take him! Where has he come from?" he said softly in the direction of the soldier.

"There are more people in command than there ever were before," replied the soldier.

"And who appoints them, the devils?"

"They appoint themselves. Everything happens of its own accord now, my friend, as in an old woman's fairy-story."

The man went up to the horses and took hold of them by their manes, whereupon Artamonov senior shouted as loudly as he could:

"Hi, call my wife!"

"Be quiet, old man," they replied. "*Isb* you, so you want your wife, do you?"

The horses went away. Artamonov passed his hand over his face and beard, felt his ear with his cold fingers, and looked about him. He was lying near the blank and windowless wall of the summer-house, beneath an apple-tree on which hung clusters of red apples like mountain-ash berries. What he lay on was hard, and although he was covered with his worn-out fox-fur coat and had on a thick winter pea-jacket, he was not warm. He could not understand why he was there. Perhaps the house was being cleaned in preparation for some festive occasion. But what festive occasion could it be? Why were there horses in the garden and a soldier near the bath-house? And who was it bawling in the court-yard:

"You are a stupid little boy, comrade! What? People are tired? It is too early to be tired yet! Without fools . . ."

Although the shouting was some way off, it deafened him and brought on noises in his head. As for his feet, they



might as well not have existed, because he could not move his legs from the knee downwards. The apple-tree on the wall was the work of a house-painter called Vanka Lukin, a thief who had afterwards robbed a church and died in prison.

A very broad man wearing a rough cap came into the summer-house, bringing in with him a cold shadow and a strong smell of tar.

"Is that Tikhon?"

"Who else could it be?"

Tikhon's grumbling reply deafened him too. The old *dvornik* spread his arms out as if he were swimming over the creaking floor.

"Who was that bawling?"

"Zakharka Morozov."

"And what is that soldier doing here?"

"It is war."

"Has the enemy reached as far as this?" asked Artamonov after a pause.

"It is war against you, Pyotr Ilyich. . . ."

"Don't trifle with me, you old fool," said his master sternly. "I am not a comrade to you!"

"This is the last war. People don't want any more after this," he heard Tikhon answer calmly. "We are all comrades now. And as for being a fool, I am really too old for it."

Tikhon was obviously laughing at him, and now he sat down unceremoniously at his master's feet without taking off his cap. In the court-yard someone was giving orders in a hoarse, strained voice:

"And no persons are to be in the streets after eight o'clock!"

"Where is my wife?" asked Artamonov.

"She has gone to look for bread."

"Look for—do you say?"

"Yes, of course. Bread is not like bricks. You don't find it lying on the ground."

Twilight was getting steadily deeper and bluer in the garden, and the soldier who stood yawning and groaning near the

bath-house was quite invisible now, except for his bayonet which gleamed like a fish in the water. Although Artamonov wanted to ask Tikhon a great many questions, he said nothing; but it made no difference. He could never understand what Tikhon said. But all the same, questions kept flashing across his mind and confusing him, because they never gave him time to think which was the most important. And he very much wanted something to eat.

"I may be a fool," grumbled Tikhon, "but all the same, I realized the truth before anybody. Look how things have turned out. I said it would mean hard labour for everybody. And that's what has happened. They have swept everything away like wood-shavings, like the dust which one brushes away with a rag. They have indeed, Pyotr Ilyich. Yes, the devil did the planing and you helped him. And what is it all for? They have gone on sinning and sinning—there is no end to the number of their sins! I have been looking on and wondering when the end would come. And now at last it has come upon you. It has all been cast in a mould for you like lead. . . . The cart has lost a wheel. . . ."

"He is raving," thought Artamonov, but still he asked:

"Why am I here?"

"You have been driven out of your house."

"Miron, too?"

"Everybody."

"And what about Yakov?"

"He hasn't been here for a long time."

"Where is Ilya?"

"It is said he is with these people. It must be so because you are still alive; otherwise . . ."

"He is raving," decided Pyotr Artamonov confidently, and said no more. "The old man is in his dotage," he thought to himself. "So it is only to be expected."

The sky was studded with tiny dim stars, and it seemed as if there had never been stars like that before, at least, not so many of them.

Tikhon took his cap off, and as he crushed it in his hands began grumbling once more.

"All your crafty stupidity has come back to you. Even beggars are better off now."

Then he suddenly changed his tone and asked:

"Do you remember the little boy who was the son of a clerk?"

"Well? What about him?"

Pyotr Artamonov could not decide whether he was more alarmed or surprised at this unexpected question. But he knew as soon as Tikhon said:

"You killed him, just as Zakhar killed the puppy. And what did you kill him for?"

Artamonov saw clearly that Tikhon had at long last reported him, and that now, ill as he was, he would be arrested. However, he was not much alarmed at the prospect; what disturbed him very much more was his inhuman stupidity. Supporting himself on his elbows, he raised his head and began talking quietly in a tone of scornful reproach, conscious of a bitter taste upon his tongue and a feeling of dryness in his mouth.

"That's a lie! There is a period of limitation for every crime and you have ignored all periods. Yes, you have gone mad. You have even forgotten what you saw with your own eyes, and what you said at the time. . . ."

"And what did I say?" interrupted the old man. "Of course, I didn't see what happened, but I understood all the same! I said what I did so as to see what you would do. I told a lie, and you were glad, you jumped at it. I looked and I looked, I waited and waited, but . . . You are all the same. Alexei Ilyich told his drunkard of a father-in-law to set fire to Barski's inn, and your father got wind of it and had the drunkard done to death. Nikita Ilyich knew about it, for, like me, he had an intuitive sense. He oughtn't to have said anything, but he told me because he was so angry with you. I said to him: 'You are a monk, you ought to forget all this. I'll be the one to remember.' You frightened him by doing the things you did. You drove him to the halter and afterwards to the monastery—to pray for us! But it was terrible for him even to have to pray for you. He daren't! And it was because of that he lost his faith. . . ."

It seemed as if Tikhon might go on talking till the end of time—talking in his quiet thoughtful way, without any apparent rancour. He was almost invisible in the thick warm darkness of late evening, and though his rough speech, which reminded one of the rustling noise made by cockroaches at night, did not frighten Artamonov, it seemed to crush him with its weight and made him speechless with astonishment. He grew more and more convinced that this incomprehensible man was mad. Now the *dvornik* heaved a long-drawn sigh, as though he had thrown a load off his shoulders, and continued in the same monotonous voice to unearth the unwanted past.

"I, too, have been robbed of my faith by you Artamonovs. Nikita Ilyich bewildered me on your account and made me an unbeliever. You have neither god nor devil. The image you keep in the house is a mere hoax. What have you got? It is impossible to tell. There may be something after all. You are frauds, and you have lived by fraud. Now it has all been proved, because they have shown you up. . . ."

With an effort Artamonov moved his body and dropped his feet, strangely heavy as they were, on to the floor. But since there was no sensation in the skin on his soles the old man could not feel the floor, and thought his feet had detached themselves and gone away, leaving him hanging in the air. This gave him a fright and he clutched hold of Tikhon's shoulder.

"What is it?" asked the *dvornik*, roughly shaking his hands away. "Don't touch me. You have no strength in you and you can't throttle me. Your father was a man of great strength, but he spent it all on boasting. You have robbed me of my faith, I tell you, and I don't know how I am to die now. I have been so long with you that . . ."

Artamonov was still more anxious for something to eat and his legs were causing him much alarm.

"Can I possibly be dying? I am not seventy-five yet. O Lord . . ."

Once more he tried to lie down, but he had not enough strength to lift his legs.

"Help me, lift my legs up," he ordered Tikhon.

Tikhon laid his late master's paralysed legs on the bench and spat. Then he sat down again and began pressing his hand into his cap. Something glistened between his fingers and Artamonov saw it was a needle. Tikhon was sewing up his cap in the dark, thereby proving that he was mad. Above him fluttered a grey moth. Three shafts of yellow light stretched through the air over the garden and a voice in the distance, faint but clear, said:

"There is no turning back for us, comrades, and there will be no turning back. . . ."

The voice was drowned by Tikhon:

"There was your father, too. He killed my brother."

"You lie," said Artamonov involuntarily, but he at once asked:

"When was it?"

"Never mind when."

"Why are you always telling lies, you madman?" asked Artamonov, suddenly discomfited by gnawing pangs of hunger. "What is it you want? Are you my conscience? My judge? Why have you said nothing for more than thirty years?"

"I said nothing because I was thinking!"

"And storing up your malice? *Ekb* . . . go and report me to the police."

"There are no police."

"Say this is the man who has given me food and drink all my life! Try him! But I suppose you have reported me already! Come, what do you want? Coerce me, frighten me, demand money out of me!"

"You have no money. You have nothing. You never had anything. As for your judges, I don't care a straw for them. I am my own judge."

"Then what are you threatening me with, you crazy fellow?"

But Tikhon was not apparently threatening him, and Artamonov was dimly aware of it.

"This is the end of men like Cain," grumbled Tikhon.

"Why was my brother murdered?"

"Only this much!"

It was his wife's voice. Where had she been? Why had she left him with that old man?

Artamonov opened his eyes and, raising himself on his elbows, gazed at the two black figures which were standing in the doorway. In a flash it came upon him that he had spent his whole life wondering who was the guilty person, and whose fault it was that his life had been such a grievous tangle, such a mass of deception. And now it had all become suddenly clear.

His wife came near and bent over him.

"Thank God . . ." she whispered.

"Tikhon is the one to be blamed for everything!" said Artamonov with decision, and he gave a sigh of relief. "She was covetous, she egged me on!"

Then he growled solemnly:

"My brother Nikita, too, ruined himself because of her. You know it yourself. . . ."

Artamonov panted for breath. It astonished him to see that his wife was neither offended nor frightened nor on the verge of tears. She was stroking his hair with her shaky hand and whispering in a gentle, anxious tone:

"Be quiet. Don't shout. There are malicious people about."

"Give me something to eat."

She pushed a cucumber and a piece of heavy bread into his hand. The cucumber was warm, but the bread stuck to his fingers like dough.

"What is this?" asked Artamonov in astonishment. "Is it for me? Is this all?"

"Be quiet, for Christ's sake," whispered Natalya. "There isn't any more, you see . . . the soldiers too. . . ."

"So this is all you have to give me after all my fears, after all the hardships of my life?"

As he weighed the bread in his hand and muttered to himself, he guessed that some unendurable and deadly outrage had been committed, for which even Natalya was not responsible.

## DECADENCE

"I don't want it," he said in a dull but firm voice, as he flung the bread towards the door.

It was picked up by Tikhon, who growled and blew at it once or twice, and then placed once more in her husband's hand by Natalya.

"Eat it, eat it," she whispered. "Don't be angry."

But Artamonov pushed her hand away, and with his eyes fast shut and his teeth clenched, repeated in a violent rage:

"I don't want it. Take it away."











